









*T. H. Gale*



AN AUSTRALIAN MILLIONAIRE.



AN  
AUSTRALIAN MILLIONAIRE.

BY  
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IN THREE VOLUMES.  
VOL. III.

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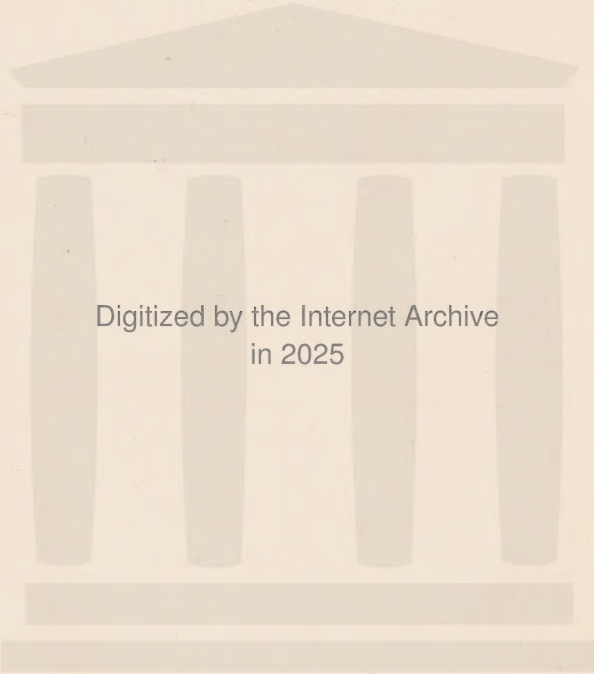


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# AN AUSTRALIAN MILLIONAIRE

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## *BOOK III.*

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### CHAPTER I.

IN KNUTSFORD—OLD NORTH FLINDERSLAND.

THE broad blue Pacific spreads before us, not a dreary, surging, rolling expanse, but a mild, rippling, crinkling blue surface, truthfully reflecting the azure above it, and broken by islands—grass-green islands, with dark cliffs peaked to the clouds, or with undulating hills, wild with foliage and skirted with silvery beach, gently lapped by virescent waves, all picturesque and refreshing to the sea-traveller, whose sight has tired of the monotony of sea and sky, whose heart hungers for a glimpse of the shore, whose feet tingle to tread dear Mother Earth. To the right, to the left, these gladsome land-spots stretch—crag and reef, not wholly unfraught

with danger, where the unskilled seaman is to the fore—so pleasant to look at, yet so perilous to approach.

Through the rippling ocean the *Boolbun* ploughs on her way, with the sunlight dancing on the waves, glinting on her port-holes as she steams beneath an early tropical sun and through tropical waters.

Brawny Jack-tar, bare-footed, bare-armed, bare-chested, with the sweat of honest labour on brow and body, wields the broom over the *Boolbun* decks, deluged from the bucket, her dribbling sides making miniature cascades at her port-holes, tightly closed, to the purgatory of the cabin inmates, who, perhaps, scarcely recovered from a rough, rude shaking of Neptune, are unable to rise, and so lie stifling until the completion of the deck-washing shall allow this one ingress for the pure air from without to be again available.

It was about six o'clock on a summer's morning, and Sol, blinking at Phœbe, *vis-à-vis*, was shooting his fiery arrows far and wide. The sixteen-day-old moon, still aloft, was paling before his ruddy majesty, as his golden glory tinted ocean and earth; she, bleached and fading, apparently abashed, gradually sank lower and lower to dip herself out of sight as

he rose higher and higher to begin another day's reign from his red-hot throne.

Saving for one individual, the deck was unoccupied by any of the passengers ; its boards were still slippery and wet, while lounges and ship-chairs were huddled on to the skylight. The solitary passenger stood by the bulwarks, heedless of damp boards beneath feet well shod ; his arms were folded across his chest ; his lengthy, supple limbs were comfortably cased in white jean ; his head was covered with a peaked tweed cap, and his eyes were fixed on the lack-lustre moon.

He did not look as one of the eleemosynary kind, yet he was as poor as Job, saving for fifty crisp bank-notes of one pound each reposing in his trunk below. He was Roland Goldwin ; with nothing in the world to call his own but his clothes and that present of £50 from one who had determined to befriend him, who looked upon him as a hero and deified him—and that was Mrs. Calliport—one of the depositaries of the secret. She had forbidden her nephew the house, and would have given lavishly to the son to lighten his poverty. 'The wrong that needs resistance' had been his. He had fought ; he had won. The severance from unholy wealth



had been to him as the amputation of a diseased limb to save a body—the lopping of a mortifying right hand. The operation was necessary for the welfare of his soul, and with a resolute strength he had torn the offending thing away with his own free will. It drew blood and groans, but it was done. Figuratively, his right hand, reddened with plunder, was cast from him, and he was crippled. Crippled, yet victorious, he was greater than Nelson, maimed for glory and lauded by crowd and court.

His triumph, concealed from the outer world, could point to no earthly tribute to come. If a laurel wreathed his brow, it was unseen, unfelt, and not set there by human hands. The compulsion to retain a false name for the honour of the family kept his conscience troubled, but he was powerless to do more than had been done already.

Looking at the moon, now but dimly outlined against the sky like the faintest of etchings, he thought, ‘ Her brilliance has gone, but her glory has not departed for ever—she will rise again ; but I, weighted with contamination, a thief, a usurper, how—how can I surmount this great wrong ? Have I done well to refuse the Captain’s offer ? Shall I, a man with sound

body and sound mind, take as a gift what self-respect bids me abjure? No, no!

“To thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.”

The blue waves, splashing merrily, gurgled and glittered, as they seemed to respond. ‘Go on,’ they murmured, ‘as the soul within thee guides; consign thyself to that wondrous Hand in the hollow of which we are gathered. We have our mission; take up thine cheerfully.’

‘Yes, I will work,’ he said, and he meant it. He had a letter of introduction to the overseer of Micola station, in old North Flindersland, now known as Knutsford. This overseer had succeeded Captain Pennacove long ago, when he began the management of the head office of Jeremiah Goldwin at Phillipia (whose estate had considerably increased within the twenty years), and Micola adjoined Washington, where Larry had elected to live since Jerry’s death, and where he reigned.

Roland was just as anxious to quit Phillipia now as Larry had been when he lost his best friend, and was eager to get far away, to live an out-door life, to do bodily work, that the nervous exhaustion experienced and unwholesome inward fermentation might be counteracted,

and was prepared to pose as the eccentric young millionaire at Micola, preferring a rough Bush life to the attractions of the city. He had a notion of eventually practising for a legal profession, and soliciting old John Tackerline, hale and hearty still at sixty, to help to this.

He had a second letter, in his breast-pocket, set apart from the first and nestling against his heart, which had served to strengthen and comfort him, and had been received at Millerton (the metropolis of Flindersland) before starting for Knutsford. It acquainted him with events that followed his departure from Phillipia, and will assist you, dear reader, over ground yet to be trodden.

He had read it many times; perhaps its sweet influence had given the waves a voice in words for him. He turned from his musing on the moon and the water, and found a seat on the skylight amidst the huddled chairs, and there drew forth that letter to read again. It was not of love, but was purely platonic, and full of consoling pity and soothing admiration, and was signed ‘Una Pennacove.’

‘DEAR ROL,’ it began,

‘To me there is something weirdly strange in having to write to you. I am not



writing to Roland Goldwin, and yet this will be addressed to him—to the dead! I deface envelope and letter with a lie, but, like you, neither is responsible for the defilement; unlike you, they are stamped with a permanent falsity. That righteous fire in your soul shall obliterate the stain; it has burned it away even now; it has cleansed you from the slime of the serpent, whose coils have bound you, but could not destroy, for truth has prevailed. We, who know all, recognise the divinity, and gloat over the monster of iniquity, writhing to death under your heel! You are not the merry Rol I have walked and talked with: you are another man, nobler and better, impoverished as you are, than the millionaire. Don't let your poverty be a distress when it is a crown of glory! Anybody can stoop to pick up money; not everybody could resign it as you have done. I don't believe I could say this to your face; I can write it better, for why should we hide what we all think of you when heaven must beam on you? So I say, "Thus shall be done to the man whom the *King* delighteth to honour." Is it Rochefoucauld who says, "Our virtues disappear when put in competition with our interests, as rivers lose themselves in the ocean"? I think it is. He was a student of

human nature, but too cynical to admit exceptions to the rule ; he seems to sneer at what is best in us, and to found the most prominent virtue on a sneaking vice. No doubt he would call your heroism pride or self-exaltation. Well, no matter what he, or such as he, may think of your present standing, we can recognise its wealth apart from that which is the wealth in gold. Dear Rol, let me comfort you this much, for I know your heart is bowed down. You bade me be your sister ; take this balm in Gilead from her.

‘Uncle says he was never so miserable. Your trouble is his, and he is vexed because you have refused aid from him. I understand your principle, and can’t think you are wrong in this ; monetary help from him will make the burden of your self-imposed debt harder to bear and harder to meet, you think.

‘I often think of that long talk we once had about the stars, and our probation from one to the other. Do you remember ? Perhaps your purification has already begun, and you will go straight to the highest heaven of all, and your present trouble is only that “discord” which is “harmony not understood.” It may be as a purification, too, for the unhappy man who has helped to bring this trouble on you.

‘Dear little Middie is like a broken-winged dove, and crouches under Mrs. Calliport’s wing, away from her father’s house, where she will not be pained with the sight of him, and where she can hide herself from all but her family and me. Aunt Jessie has forbidden him her house—she can’t forgive him yet, and will not see him—but, for all that, she sent him £100 to help to get rid of Mrs. G——, who, however, has left Goolgun, and gone nobody seems to know where. We have heard that certain investments of hers have failed, and she is positively ruined. Upon this Aunt Jessie promptly acted, desiring him in a few curt lines not to let it be known that she was the donor. “We can’t throw her out in the street,” she observed to Jessie, with a frown on her face and water in her eyes. Isn’t that like good Aunt Jessie? Mrs. Dripper is also reduced to poverty through speculation with her ill-gotten gains, and in order to live has become a nurse at the Debella Hospital. Uncle used his influence in her behalf, for he pities her. I don’t know whether he or Mr. Larry raved the most against Mrs. G——, only uncle spent his superfluous wrath in a first flare-up, while Mr. Larry, like a thunder-charged cloud, kept on at a continuous rumbling, sometimes throw-

ing out a dangerous flash. Don't think he has held aloof from you out of any ill-will or unkindness, because I don't believe he bears you any grudge. His manner since the terrible disclosure would certainly lead one to think he did, but I have seen more of him than you. You belong to a family he detests for the sake of its founder with a strong-headed inconsistency, but though almost broken-hearted to know who you really are, he can't help liking you. The disappointment has had a strange effect on his rugged nature, and the fact of no worse punishment to come than what has befallen the two people he despises is a bitterness to him. Yesterday he went off to Millerton by train, and will probably soon be at his station again. As for Mr. Tackerline, he will do anything he possibly can to serve you; and as uncle laughs at the idea of searching for next-of-kin, and calls it a wild-goose chase, and says in a sharp, emphatic way, as if he knew more than he cares to tell: "He will *never* be found," Mr. Tackerline asserts, "So much the better, for while the search goes on things can remain *in statu quo*; concealment will be easy." In order to insure concealment, as he promised you, he has begun to institute inquiries for next-of-kin—not to

Jeremiah Goldwin, but to *you*, implying that the heir is desirous to befriend the needy relative, or relatives, of his father. Of course, the search is a mere formality, since it will lead to nothing, and caution will be exercised against the advent of pretenders. Goolgun is shut up, and both uncle and Larry are well pleased to let the claim stand over, since it is painfully forced upon them at your cost. Aunt Jessie intends carrying Middie away to Wondoo again; she is so kind, and I'm sure her heart yearns to the sinning nephew, though she is severe, and rules his wife to be likewise. Is the love for him frozen since the day she bent over poor Mid's prostrate form and thought the cruel truth had killed her, as it had nigh killed herself the day you told her everything? Then try and revive it, Rol, for he is being driven to do reckless things, we hear, and love and leniency may save him from ruin.'

Thus Una wrote, and if her letter was blotted here and there with the splash of a tear, or damp with the touch of his lips, what wonder? By the time he had finished reading it, the deck was almost dry, and presented something like order, while other passengers began to emerge from the companion. Most of his fellow-

travellers knew him by name, and believed they knew much of his antecedents. There was a quickened interest in the glances directed at him, which proved he stood as an interesting curiosity. Australia is not so prolific in millionaires as in rabbits, and it is not every day in the year that one is thrown for a few days with a number of less worldly-favoured individuals to share the pleasures and the perils of the vast deep, or take part in the general accommodation of the saloon as one of themselves. A few were satisfied to look at him, as he was young and comely. Some were inclined to address him ; others were intrusive, and talked whether he was disposed to be sociable or not ; but he was not so disposed, and had lost that free-and-easy courtesy of manner and ready smile, waving upward to admit a glimpse of ivory behind, which had won him friends everywhere.

One gentleman during the voyage had opened a conversation with him, anxious to make an impression on an apparent stolidity by giving him an invitation to his own house on landing at Etoco, the capital of Knutsford, and one time known as Robsville. He was a small man, with a clean-shaven face, excepting for a very slight moustache of pale umber, and had a prominent chin, a wide mouth, and a head



well thrown back, so that his chin sharpened upward, and his whole appearance presented self-importance in its strongest light. He was member for South Etoco, and emphasized this fact by handing his card to Roland, and stating that he would be happy to see him again and take him to Government House. He did not tell him that he possessed a couple of marriageable daughters, which possession had led to his amiability.

‘There, sir, keep that by you,’ he said, pushing the card into Roland’s hand, ‘and come and see us *sans cérémonie*, you know, whenever you’ve nothing better to do.’

Roland, in ignorance of the young ladies in the background, bowed politely and thanked him. But so far had adversity affected him that cynicism sometimes rose to the surface, and he smiled the cynic’s smile when he pictured to himself the horror of the honourable member should he know he was dispensing his favours to a poverty-stricken man. The smile struck his would-be friend unpleasantly, and made him think he was toadying to a cad; all the same, the toadying did not abate.

The *Boolbun* was but twelve hours from Etoco when Roland re-read Una’s letter. Before the sun fell she dropped anchor in

Kennedy Bay, with the Etoco hills rising distinctly in the distance, and a glistening, curving beach opposite. At Etoco Roland was to take train for the interior, and from thence ride to Micola.

All the *Boolbun* saloon passengers now crowded to that side of her facing the city and its encircling green heights, with one great-great-grandfather of a hill, red, rugged, rocky, and wide-stretching, with a turret-like peak towering to the skies and over all from the background. Time was when passengers to Etoco — then Robsville — had to be transmitted to her shores by lighter or tender, sometimes by an open boat if the tide ran low; but this was before North and South Flindersland had separated, before the energetic North had achieved its aim; now, far on in the last decade of this pushing nineteenth century, a lengthy jetty, like a huge elongated tongue, protruded from the city, bearing railway-lines, over which a train thundered from wharf to steamer, from steamer to wharf, bearing freight, human and otherwise.

The *Boolbun* crowd craned its neck and quickened its sight to catch the glimpse of some familiar face peeping upward from the cars below or the jetty, ready to smile a wel-

come. Roland expected nobody, knew nobody, and while pondering on this unusual experience of being friendless, a young man with whom he had exchanged courtesies during the voyage came and stood alongside of him.

‘You’re a stranger in these parts, if I remember rightly?’ he began. ‘You told me so, I think?’

‘Yes; and you?’ from Roland.

‘Well, no. I know it pretty well, and can put you up to a thing or two, if you like.’

Roland, seemingly occupied with watching the city, as it lay opposite, basking in sunlight, gave no answer.

‘It hasn’t got the Phillipia “go,” you see, but it isn’t half such a bad place as you might think to find, after your noisy cities. though it’ll run ahead of them some day. I’ll be able to show you about,’ mumbled the officious gentleman, with a cigar in his mouth and his elbows on the bulwarks.

‘There will be no time for showing about, thank you,’ returned Roland; ‘I only stay here over-night.’

‘And you don’t know an inch of the ground yet?’

‘No.’

‘And I do. I’m a commercial traveller, you see.’ The commercial traveller removed his

cigar, and, with fingers straddling it, looked upon this young millionaire with some amusement before he said: 'Why, you've got no end of property here, if your father was the man I've heard about!'

'I beg your pardon,' said Roland loftily, and with colour mounting to his hair-roots. Was he going to be tantalized with impertinent questions already? he thought.

'No offence—no offence,' said the other lightly, noting the flush, 'only I'd like to show you all over the place. Will you come below for a tamberoora?'

'A what?' Roland knew little of colonial bar slang.

'A shout, then—a nip—wet the baby,' laughed the traveller, who could not quite believe in this girlish ignorance. 'Come on.'

'No, thank you, I'd rather not;' and Roland hastily turned on his heel with a 'Good-afternoon; I'm going on shore,' and left him.

'Shabby customer,' said the commercial to himself, who was annoyed at not being accepted as lion-leader. 'Won't even join in a shout. Wish I had a third of his tin; I'd teach him how to spin it.'

Roland, glad to shake off an undesirable companionship, hurried away, and stepping

over the bridge from deck to jetty, soon settled himself in a carriage corner, ready to steam on to Etoco. He was surrounded by men, women, and children, yet he was alone. Those who had been a few days at sea were relieved to be away from the *Boolbun's* monotony; wives chatted volubly to husbands, and babies crowed, and children laughed and clapped their little hands, as they were rushed onward, and saw shimmering water, green hills, and rocky walls fleeing before them.

Roland, absorbed in thought, and still smarting from the intrusive questioning of the commercial traveller, was pondering on his words, 'You've got no end of property here.' Yet as the train steamed over the jetty he was roused to take an interest in his surroundings, the beauties of nature, and found pleasure in watching the dimpled blue bay catching the vivid rays of a tropical sunset, the verdant heights and bold acclivity steeped to the summit in rich sunshine and ruddy as burnished gold.

Huge boulder-like clouds were banked in the far-off western sky, all granite-marked and set against an apparent crimson sea, toned with orange tints sweeping across the background of soft sapphire, slowly fading to the palest heliotrope and flecked with wondrous clouds

of beautiful variety: feathery and golden clouds as fronds and ferns delicately traced in sea-green lines; lacy clouds, rainbow-hued, mottled and broken; grotto-mounted clouds, transparent with scarlet flame—the whole a shifting mass of colour, so fired with its dazzling brilliance that the east caught the reflection, and all things within its reach were touched with its glory: even the rocks, rugged and bold in their gaunt nakedness, became radiant before the divine kaleidoscope announcing the decline of another day. A pink haze curtained the horizon, and pinky elves seemingly danced in the wavelets. Roland looked up reverently towards this God-painting in the gallery of heaven, beyond the grasp of art—inimitable here below.

‘Pretty sight that, Mr. Goldwin!’

Roland turned sharply from the window to see Mr. Pendell, the member for South Etoco, at his elbow.

‘Glorious!’ ejaculated Roland, not at all pleased when that gentleman, having left his seat opposite, seated himself again near him and would talk. The spell of the glory was broken with the rasping thin accents dinning in his ear.

‘See anything like that down south?’ he asked.



‘No.’

‘How long are you going to remain here?’

‘Only over-night. I’m off to the interior in the morning.’

‘Greycott?’

‘Beyond a bit—Micola.’

‘So. Well, it’s a good run. I’ve been there. Gower’s a long-headed one—plenty of push in him.’

‘I don’t know him.’

Roland looked through the window again with annoyance on his features. He objected to an embarrassing inquisitiveness; but the little man was determined to get as much as he could out of the young one, and continued:

‘So this is quite a new experience for you? Well, it doesn’t do for a man to be tied in one place after a certain age; he gets musty and rusty if he doesn’t rub up against the world. Look at me, sir. Knocking about the world has rubbed me up. I came to this place with three coppers in my pocket. I did. But what odds? A butcher shop gave me work. This Etoco was Robsville then, and queer enough it was, with one street not a quarter of a mile long, and all on one side, too, with this very creek—see, we’re just entering it now—opposite. It was dust, hills, rocks and man-

grove, with a couple of banks, two pubs, and an odd mixture of people and lean, hungry, naked blacks parading the town. Look at it now, sir. Pushing men have done it.' He lifted his chin in the air, and pulled at a hair of his moustache with a complacency that seemed to add, 'And I am one of them ; behold me ! nothing to pay.'

'No doubt,' answered Roland, 'separation has sent it ahead, and to pushing men separation is due.'

'Sent it ahead ! it has gone up like a balloon—a rocket ! They don't call it "the remote portion of the colony" down south now ; they did while their greedy hands hung on to the ropes. Well, they blistered their fingers and had to let go, because we northerners gave a big pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together, and they miss the "remote portion," and we can laugh at them. Push, sir—push is the sword to fight with. I was a butcher's clerk ; that's a long while ago. I pushed on, and got to be a surveyor, and member of the House in the now flourishing capital. I'm proud of it, sir, I am !' Mr. Pendell expected eulogy from his listener, but, not getting it, he went on to ask further questions. 'Are you going to visit our great mining centre, Carter's Heights ?'

‘Not just yet.’

‘Where are you going to put up?’

‘I am not decided yet,’ replied Roland, who had no idea whatever, and, with a lack of practicality in worldly things, had not thought of it until this minute.

‘Well, take my advice and try the Esplanade. It is just opposite the bay, and cool and comfortable.’

‘Thank you, I will.’

Then the train, rushing onward, was gliding through the city, and at last reached the terminus.

‘Well, good-bye,’ said Mr. Pendell to Roland, with quite an affectionate hold on his hand. ‘You’ll be coming down this way again, and when you do, don’t forget to favour us with a call. You’ll like our little humpy, Mr. Goldwin,’ he laughed, and accented the word ‘humpy’ that it might be understood as mansion.

Roland bowed and thanked him, but did not think it necessary to state the visit would not be forthcoming.

The sunset was fading as he emerged from the crowd at the station, followed by a porter bearing his luggage. Knutsford knows no lingering twilight, and over the iridescent clouds

there began to creep the misty veil of dusk, to develop soon into night, as he, deposited in a cab with his baggage, was being driven to the hotel recommended, the Esplanade, opposite a well-built structure from which it took its name, running the length of the beach, with an avenue of splendid trees of ponciana, kola-nut, and eucalypti.

Passing rapidly through the principal street, partly serpentine, with other vehicles behind, before, and on each side of him, conveying residents and visitors to their destination, he could take a hurried view of the new capital, with its tall warehouses and pretentious shops ; but suddenly curving at a corner, he lost sight of the long street, and left its traffic behind, to be brought face to face with Kennedy Bay, with the ocean line beyond, kissing the sky within purpling vapours. Calm as a lake it lay before him, palled with evening shadows, dotted with shipping, and canopied with a sky softened with pale violet tints in the dusk, and from which a tiny star just peeped. The esplanade came between him and the silvery stretch of beach beyond, and its trees rustled with a musical swish, swish, accompanying the lap of the mild wave opposite.

He was being carried over a clean, broad

gravelled road fronting the houses, and saw pretty cottages and homesteads, gardens and churches, flitting by, and enjoyed the present tranquillity, believing he should see no more of the commercial traveller and the member for South Etoco.

Etoco had at one time seemed to him as a cherry ripening to fall into his mouth when he should hold up his head to receive it, and, lo! now it was nothing to him. He could not claim a square inch of it, as he sighed, 'Why was I reared to think I should call some of it mine?' Nevertheless, he could not be devoid of interest in a city of such strides. Lolling peacefully against the cushions of the hansom in dreamy idleness, he was sorry when the drive terminated at the hotel door.

## CHAPTER II.

### BUSH INITIATION.

AT this early period of the new colony's existence, that struggle to emulate the rapid advance of the venerable mother colony and her elder daughters was beginning to declare itself even in the back country—on the selection, the farm, the station. Bush homes were undergoing evolution into attractive and commodious residences, and luxurious taste and desire were being developed.

Irrigation, the ensilage scheme and the artesian bore promised prosperity in the very teeth of a drought. Labour-saving machinery, meaning fewer hands and more work done with bigger profits for the pastoral, agricultural, and shepherd kings, frowned on the conservative sons of toil, or, rather, they frowned at it, and a scowl, like the echo, is often but a duplicate expression of our own creation.

Oh ! shall we ever touch that ‘ promised land of Bellamy’s, the land of milk and honey, when all men shall think, speak, and act in unison, content to be led by guiding-strings, gathered within the grasp of a handful of leaders ?

Shall the general interest dovetail like a Chinese puzzle, with its curiously-fitting blocks cut so unlike, yet making under the correct manipulation a wonderfully harmonious whole ?

Shall the puzzle ever be solved ? Shall it come to pass that men in a world where variety rules in class, colour, and creed, in form and feature, in race, character and attribute, shall dance to the one method of piping, bow at one shrine, freely accept for adoption and without argument that leading principle calculated to force heterogeneous humanity to one mind ? Perhaps the Divine organization which has surely planned the one diversity plans the other.

‘ Man is little lower than the angels.’ When he is not a little lower he will know content, but never before ; when he is on a level the millennium will have arrived.

Well, it was not the year 2,000, and every man studied his own interests first ; and there were men to swear by the new patents and



modern ideas, filing off labour and piling on capital as a natural sequence, and men to swear against them for exactly the same reason. Of course, they decried them, and being thrown out from the labour handed down perhaps from their fathers, who can fail to pity them or give a kind word to urge them on to woo fortune in another way? Not I—not you.

Alexander Gower, successor to Captain Pennacove as manager of the Micola run, was one of the many to embrace every means that might ameliorate the condition of the station. He was a hard-headed, wiry-framed Scotchman, with grizzled tawny hair and a beard to match flowing to his waist, with high cheek-bones and red-brown face, with a huge fist that for hair might have matched Esau's. He was near fifty years old, but only within the last year had taken unto himself a wife. Not so long ago he had dwelt in the primitive hut of two rooms which had once served Captain Pennacove for a residence.

Gower had been content with bachelor habits, and his own culinary marvels in the way of Johnny cakes and damper. Asking himself whether marriage was a failure, he decided in the affirmative, and continued to drain his tin billy of tea, and swallow salt junk with stolid

satisfaction. But there came a time of doubt, and then a revolution of ideas on the pros and cons of marital life.

There happened to be a station a few miles ahead of Micola to which Gower had *carte blanche* to visit at his pleasure, where he might spend a happy hour or so with the worthy squatter who lived there in the bosom of his family.

Will Gratrak rejoiced in the possession of a wife and three little daughters, for whom a governess was provided. It was at Gratrak's hearth that Gower's heart began to yield to the influence of 'lovely woman.'

There gastronomy held such sway that it undermined former opinions. Seed-cake and jam-tarts, home-brewed ale and home-made bread, savoury sandwiches, and the wholesome varied board of the thrifty wife, made his stomach revolt at a continuance of damper and junk for the rest of his life, for at Micola he resolved to live and die.

It was at Gratrak's that the presence and welcome chatter of ladies opened his eyes to the fact of his having a lonely, unlovely home; that the idea of winning Miss Spriggins, the governess, to create a close copy of the Gratraks' Eden for him, took root, thrived

and fructified. Miss Spriggins, like Barkis, was 'willin'.' So his old hut was relegated to the head-stockman, Barney O'Flynn, and a new building sprang up in due time to receive the bride—a palace by contrast to the old hut of gum-tree slabs for walls and bark for roof, and yawning crevices, clogged here and there with clay to exclude the rude breath of piercing winds. It was a weather-board cottage—a comfortably designed habitation, with a couple of rooms to spare for the accommodation of guests, and one apartment, larger than the rest, cosily furnished, and known as the drawing-room.

In winter this latter was glowing with a huge fire—for winter can be biting and bitter in the tropics—of blazing logs, piled within a wide recess in the far-off wall. In the summer the great gap was filled with pretty pot-plants, and hung around with marsupial skins, and a 'brush' or two of the dingo; it was a veritable Australian nook.

Alec Gower was scarcely married twelve months when he received intimation from Captain Pennacove relative to a visit from Roland Kovodel Goldwin. Gower had never known Jerry, but knew him quite well by

repute—so well that he was anxious to do all honour to his son, now the millionaire, as he believed, of course.

Being wanted at Micola, as it was a busy time, he could not get as far as Etoco to receive him as he desired; the only thing he could do was to ride as far as Greycott, the nearest town of the district, where a daily train plied from the capital; and this he did, with Barney O'Flynn, the head-stockman, at his side, leading a third horse—a smooth-coated, mild-eyed mare—girthed and saddled in readiness for the young master to mount. A dog, foxy and mongrel, with a stump of a tail, and a black patch over his eye, which earned him the name of Dick Dead-eye, cantered at the horse's heels all the way to Greycott. Together they stood, men and beasts, at the railway-station, where men, women, and children were gathering, some in knots, some scattered all on the look-out for the iron horse, the belching of which could be seen in the distance, and which soon, snorting and bustling, fussed into the terminus, with its train of carriages and trucks and hot and weary passengers, while the sun still shone high.

'The young master's comin' for a look round, I suppose?' queried Barney, as he shaded his

eyes with a big brown hand the better to see the incoming train.

‘I dinna ken much aboot it,’ replied Alec. ‘The Captain says he’s got no notion of hard work, but all the same wants to try on the Jackeroo business; he says he’s got a head like a poet’s and hands like a lady’s. Queer things to bring to work with, eh? And he says he’s a braw lad, too. I never saw him more than you, so we’ll just have to spot the first callant as he jumps on the platform, and so find the right mon.’

‘If you don’t disremember the old man, it might be a bit of a guide,’ suggested Barney.

‘Weel, seeing that I never saw the father either, and set foot in the colony just as he took up his last station at Gobong, down there in Phillipia, that won’t help. Here she comes.’

Roland’s eyes were busy at his vantage-pane from within the carriage; with the gradual cessation of motion he rose to his feet, stretched himself wearily, and next slipped his head and part of his shoulders through the window. All he saw had novelty as he gazed upon the Bush township. Selector, squatter, storekeeper, were each fairly represented on the platform. Tradesmen and loafers and Mongolians were all there, and

all alike coatless, vestless, with their clay pipes shooting from their lips, or hanging from the mouth-corner, or in hand for a second as they discharged the tobacco foulness from their palates with guttural noises on all sides or anywhere, or puffed their smoke in the faces of the bystanders.

There were but three of the aboriginal class, and they belonged to a station—two of the three employed as drawer of water and hewer of wood: an original governor of the soil, ebony black, and anointed with grease that made his face shine; and his gin in scarlet petticoat, clinging to lean, shapeless limbs, with a cast-off black jersey on her body, and a piccanninny astride her neck. They jabbered from their own vocabulary, and the jabbering mingled with the yaw-yaw-yong of the Chinamen, to fall on Roland's ears as a confused medley of harsh sounds.

Some few horsemen appeared in the background; two were standing by their horses and watching eagerly the exit of the passengers from the carriages. One in particular arrested Roland's attention, with bridle over his arm and Bush dress. His long legs were encased in riding-breeches, strapped to the knee with brown-leather leggings, and held by a belt,

adorned with pouch and sheath-knife hanging at his side ; with a cabbage-tree hat perched on tawny, grizzled locks, a stout riding-whip in his left hand, spurs on heels, and a scarlet silk handkerchief wound about his throat to fall as a tie over a Crimean shirt—to peep through a rift here and there in the breastplate of tawny beard ; and withal the short clay pipe in his mouth, while a dog close by yelped at everybody, and sniffed around alternately.

‘ I wonder if that fellow is from Micola, or if he could give me a few useful hints about getting there ? ’ thought Roland.

‘ Now, I wonder if that young chap could tell me if young Mr. Goldwin come along with him in the train ? ’ thought Alec, who had seen half a dozen ‘ braw ’ lads step from carriage to platform, and began to feel as confused as Roland was helpless, and both were consequently propelled towards each other. Alec, walking his horse, came up to Roland as Roland approached Alec.

‘ Guid-e’en to you, young sir, ’ said the latter, ‘ but has a Mr. Goldwin come on in your train or been in your company ? ’

Had this question been put to Roland but a month before he must needs have met it with a jocular reply, and one of his winning smiles ;



but as matters stood the very utterance of the name he falsely held was a sharp reminder to his sensitive mind, and grated on his ears. Grave in his demeanour, dusty, heated, he stood before Alec, and simply said :

‘*I am called Mr. Goldwin.*’

Alec Gower, somewhat chilled at the manner of the announcement, which to his quick penetration betokened an irritation at the question, nevertheless extended his Esau-like hand and exclaimed :

‘Weel a weel, then, that’s a goodish bit of luck for me, for I am called Alec Gower by most folk, and ha’ been making my eyes sore trying to set them on the right mon and gie him weelcom to Micola—so weelcom is the word, sir.’

The gravity was swept from Roland’s features for a moment as he clasped the big hand.

‘So you are Alec Gower, are you?’ he began. ‘I ought to have recognised you from Captain Pennacove’s description, and did not, and Larry’s, too. I’ve often heard him speak of you. Some instinct alone impelled us to inquire of each other, I suppose. You seem to me quite an old friend.’

Alec, not a little pleased at the change in his young master’s tones from frigidity

to heartiness, ejaculated between closed lips the sing-song 'H'm, h'm' of the 'land o' cakes,' which is equivalent to the English 'Yes,' and which is as impossible to reproduce by pen as it is to grasp an echo with the hand or clutch at the sunbeam.

Then followed a renewal of handshaking and an introduction to Barney, who, having noted from his distant stand the familiarity between the overseer and the new arrival, conjectured rightly that the 'braw' boy had been found, so he leaped on his own horse and led Roland's mount towards him. He was inexpressibly touched when Roland pressed his hand, too, and made some kindly speech. Roland's fingers were crushed within a fierce grip, which was meant to atone for lack of words, of which Barney was not a master, and in his heart he there and then summed up a verdict in the young man's favour.

'A born gentleman he is,' he mumbled quietly. 'None o' the dude about him.'

'Well, sir, here's your mount,' said Alec, ready for a swing on to his own saddle, and stroking the neck of the mare awaiting Roland. 'She's a fairy, and we called her Dame Trot in the old time; but my missis has christened her again—she's Titania now. A great one

for the books, sir, is my missis. Jump up, Mr. Goldwin, and try her a wee bit. She'll go like a hansom cab—she's an easy-chair, the pick of our run; and, as you must be dry after the journey, and we give a run round to the pubs when we come down, p'raps you'll join us at the Greycott Arms, Mr. Goldwin, in a drink, if it's all the same to you. We'll get it over in a cat-loup and start freshened. The train gets in earlier now, so we'll get through an hour's riding before the sun falls, and it'll be hot. We'll send for your traps to-morrow, when the cart goes in for supplies. All labelled ?

‘Yes; and there's not too much.’

‘Vera guid, sir. Now, will you jump ?’

Roland eyed Titania doubtfully; his equestrian experience hitherto had been but meagre, and then of the mild canter type; but seeing what was expected of him, he made no hesitation, but cheerfully set his foot in the stirrup and bounded on Titania's back. The trial-trip was not a lengthy one, for in less than ten minutes the three halted at the Greycott Arms, to give, as Alec said, ‘Crook his turn.’

They all entered the bar together, with Dick Dead-eye at their heels.

Gower was anxious to introduce Roland, as

his father's son should be introduced, to the whole district, if possible, where the name of Goldwin was so well known, and always associated with vast wealth, and liberality in proportion. To do this he began with the usual preliminary 'shout' all round.

Roland looked about him curiously, and noted the bar to be but a rough imitation of the ordinary city haunts where one class of men imbibe slow poison as nectar, and laugh at the blue ribbon. It was full of men, newcomers and constant-comers, who all seemed to know Alec and Barney, to whom they gave a side-nod or some sort of greeting.

A barmaid, inclined to a rough sort of prettiness and dash of speech, stood in attendance. She was smartly attired, decked with jaunty ribbons and bangled wrists, and hair tumbling almost on to her nose, freed from its curling-papers, and presenting a faithful copy of aboriginal wool.

When Roland, in response to her 'What will you have, sir?' chose a mild beverage in the shape of a glass of ginger-ale, she observed him with some curiosity and a bold stare, letting her eyebrows swiftly fly upwards in surprise, till they disappeared in the wool, as she said, with a scoffing merriment, 'Does yer

mother know yer out?' At which all but Roland and his two new-found friends laughed a loud guffaw.

Gower and Barney were vexed, and Roland, not ignoring the drift of the question, vouchsafed no reply, but waited in dignified silence to be served as he desired, while the men who knew him not understood that he was not a target for jest, and eyed him furtively, and Crook, mine host, dug a forefinger in Alec's breast, as he asked :

'Where, now, did you pick that new chum up? He's a rum customer to call for stuff like that.'

'That gentleman,' flatly answered Gower, with a stress on the second word, 'is Lucky Jerry's lad, and you had better tell Miss Saucebox over there to mind what she is about, or you won't see him here in a hurry again.' And next, raising his voice and tossing a note on the bar-counter, he said : 'Mr. Goldwin will take ginger-ale. Fetch us two brandies and one ginger-ale.'

This announcement of the young millionaire's presence caused a visible effect on all present. Miss Saucebox coloured up, and drew her lips in for a noiseless whistle; the strange men began to whisper among them-

selves, and look longer on the son of the man of whom they all had heard at one time or another, the man whose wealth had tripled itself since he had left it behind.

Crook strode at once to Roland's side to make an awkward obeisance and say :

'You're welcome to Greycott, Mr. Goldwin.'

Roland's expression was not an amiable one, as he gave a solemn 'Thank you,' bowed stiffly to Crook, and then turned his back on him, to stand by the counter and wait for his ginger-ale.

Gower, having asked each man what drink he preferred, did not get much change out of his pound-note when the glasses were drained and set down.

Goldwin was expected to 'shout' next, but, having soothed his parched throat with the harmless drink, he walked quickly out of the bar and remounted Titania, in waiting for Gower and Barney. He was sickened and irritated; it was not this foretaste of the life he had elected to lead for a little while that made his heart sink, but the name of Goldwin fitted to him still, which was as a hair-shirt, the more stinging for pressure. Here even in the Bush the misery of it all would not be softened, as he had

hoped, but was aggravated ; so he strode gloomily from the bar, intending never to enter it again.

Alec and Barney, having swallowed their draught, soon followed him, but not before the former had offered a defence for his guest's conduct.

'Ye had no call to raise a laugh agen him.' Miss Saucebox, catching his eye fixed on her, only tossed her head, and he continued : ' He's a gentleman born and reared, and dinna understand our rough Bush ways.'

'And,' put in Barney, 'I'm thinkin' the green 'll wear off by-and-by. He ain't a dude, that's the truth.'

'He ain't a chip of the block, anyhow,' remarked Crook, when Gower and O'Flynn were at their horses again. 'The old man would ha' laughed along with us ; he wouldn't ha' stalked out like a prince, as if we was dirt, with never a civil good-bye.'

Mr. Crook was disappointed. He quite expected that Jerry's son would have done the shouting, and that with a big cheque without calling for change. He had heard of the early Cræsus diggers of the southern colonies who, to convince others of the superfluity of their gold, were reputed to have made sandwiches



of their five-pound notes for their own consumption, or to have converted them into pipe-spills. That young Goldwin had failed to do this, or even to leave a heavy cheque, as his father was always said to have done when he visited Crook-like establishments, was certainly a bad mark set against him, and made Crook say to all present :

‘He ain’t a chip of the block, anyhow. What’s a fiver to him? And then to go strutting off like that, after a sixpenny drink, too, and that out of Gower’s pocket! It’s a dirty trick! He ain’t like the Jerry I’ve heerd on. He’s a bloomin’ swell, and got no go in him. Kep’ too long at his books. I’ve heerd say he’s a university man. I never did stick up for too much eddication out ’ere.’

Alec and Barney rejoined Roland, swung themselves on to their saddles, and the three turned their faces towards Micola, maintaining silence for several minutes, since the young master seemed put out and little inclined to talk ; but each was busy thinking.

Alec was wondering how best to initiate Jerry’s son, how to break him in to Bush ways, and make a ‘mon’ of him, if he meant to make a long stay. He knew he had made a bad impression at the Greycott Arms, and

wished to protect him from future condemnation, but meant to do the breaking-in gently.

Barney, voting him a 'brick,' doubled up a fist mechanically, ready to knock down the first one who might dare to contradict the assertion. On their way they trotted, with the evening sun blazing in their faces, and with Dick Dead-eye galloping after his master. The gum-trees towered on all sides, some with scanty foliage, some gaunt and leafless, forming with their crooked naked boughs a broken network against the far-off mountains, smoky-blue, and undulating, touching the clouds; sundried water-holes yawned here and there, and parched grass, fevered with drought, crackled where the weight of hoofs fell.

Dick Dead-eye, with his tail erect and ears stiffened, yelped at a flock of magpies screaming their evening song as they soared overhead, a mottled patch before the sky.

He thought he saw those feathered myrmidons of the Bush at which he was wont to bark, so drilled by Barney. He halted, with his muzzle upturned, and gave forth a succession of snaps and growls till they disappeared, and then, with lolling tongue and wagging stump, renewed his run after the horsemen until his sharp eye noted an opossum on the bough of a tree,

half dormant, and he barked again, with a leap at the trunk. The opossum, aroused, scudded away higher, and then, as if in defiance, hung, head foremost, by its tail ringed securely to one of the tallest branches, blinking his soft black eyes at the mongrel foiled and snapping. But, instinctively knowing the prey to be beyond his reach, the dog did as his betters, and turned scornfully from 'sour grapes,' yet with a drooping stump now, and a half-hearted trot onward; while Roland, taking his maiden Bush-ride on a summer's afternoon in the tropics, with the sun gradually sinking, yet flashing in his eyes, and an hour from complete decline, was realizing this fiery king's power in Knutsford.

The heat-drops stood on his face and neck; the mare—for all Alec's eulogy—was rough in her shamble to a city-bred lad, unaccustomed to horse exercise; and no matter how he tried to accommodate himself to her paces, he was painfully conscious of a looseness in his joints and a shifting seat.

Alec, always keen of observation, noted the discomfort signalled on the young man's face, and thereupon suggested a halt.

'Hot work, sir, for you, I dare say,' he said, not without a slight twinkle of fun in his expression. 'We'll bide a wee bit, eh?'

‘Hot!’ replied Roland, ‘rather say roasting.’

Glad to halt, he drew rein, and pulled out his handkerchief to mop his head, face, neck and hands.

‘You’ve got too much to carry, faith!’ said Barney. ‘Throw off your coat, sir, and I’ll chuck it over my saddle.’

Roland, glad to be relieved in any way, improved upon this advice, and stripped himself of vest as well as coat, to give them into Barney’s custody. In his white linen shirt, white trousers, and a broad-brimmed white straw hat (clothing recommended by Captain Pennacove), he contrasted strangely with his companions in their corduroy breeches, Crimean shirts, and cabbage-tree head-gear.

It did not strike him as ludicrous, but merely emphasized a starting-point in the casting off of old habits.

‘What would they say at Phillipia if they saw me now?’ he smilingly asked himself.

Gower noted the smile, and translated it as relief.

‘Ah, coom, that looks more like business,’ quoth he, as Roland rested and took a quick survey of the country, with his hat, like Gower’s and Barney’s, tilted forward to protect his eyes from the glare. ‘We won’t have that fire-ball

for long noo ; then we'll no' be in a hurry over it, but ride quiet like, and gie the moon a chance to see us on to the run.'

Roland scarcely heeded this, his attention being attracted by numerous mounds—baby pyramids—scattered far and wide and studding the stretch of country around and before him, which to his fancy presented a rough semblance to a camping-ground dotted with mud huts instead of tents.

'What are those?' he asked, pointing with his whip from right to left. 'Huts, or what?'

'Ant-hills,' said Barney.

'Clever little creatures,' said Alec. 'Some day you shall see one of their castles, with halls and rooms, and with more honest work in them than in many of our tumble-down houses.'

'They have been at work since the creation, I dare say,' Roland asserted, with a slow movement of his head, as he glanced all around him with a fresh interest. 'I have read something of their habits, and Solomon must have studied them, since he quotes them as an example of industry.'

Alec gave out another 'H'm—h'm,' and lifted his hat as if in a church porch.

'“Go to the ant, thou sluggard,” and do likewise,' he said, with all the reverence of his

nation for the spirit and text of the Eternal Book. 'There ain't any reading going to equal that Book, sir,' he added. 'It won't be kept down under a heap of new-fangled notions, as folks would like to keep it, but can't, because it's got a soul and must rise. It won't—it can't die.'

'Shall we get along?' asked Barney stolidly, and indifferent to the subject.

'No hurry, mon,' returned Gower; 'we'll leave it to Mr. Goldwin.'

'Oh, I'm ready,' said Roland, uttering a pious fraud in his desire not to detain them.

All agreed, they renewed their trot, with but a temporary interruption through a mother kangaroo, who, munching at the hillside, sitting upright, tripod-wise, supported by legs and tail, and bearing in her pouch two tiny duplicates of herself, with ears, eyes, and nose peeping therefrom, had all her inborn timidity aroused with the clatter of the horse-hoofs, and went madly leaping across the track of the horses, to startle them as she had been startled from her harbour.

Titania, under a strange hand, reared slightly, but, steadied by Barney's well-known voice, and a quick grip at her rein, relapsed into the trot which Alec called easy and poor

Roland thought purgatory, and never slackened it until she landed him at Micola.

On foot again, and now under star and moonshine, he, weary, hot, and with leaping nerves and aching muscles, walked a little way with Gower towards his home, while Barney led the horses off to the paddock.

Alec's heavy boots echoed through a long passage (which Mrs. Gower called the hall), and Roland, having crossed the threshold with him, kept at his side under escort to the room which had been specially prepared for Jerry Goldwin's son.

'Here it is, sir,' said Alec; 'not like what you've been used to, but our best.'

'I could be content with less,' replied Roland, with a quick glance at the surroundings. 'This is quite cosy, and you are very kind.'

'Honoured, sir, honoured, if you please. And if you dinna mind taking a change of claithing till your traps coom, I'll git them from somewhere.'

Roland was anxious for such a change, and said so.

'If they're not a pretty fit they'll be fresh,' said Alec; 'and take your ain time to dress, sir. The missis is in the kitchen, and she'll



feed you on summat better than junk and damper.'

Then he left Roland to his ablutions, and went clanking back again through the passage to find what he had offered.

## CHAPTER III.

### INTRODUCTION TO THE RUN.

ROLAND, having been provided with the desired change of clothing, and put in possession of his coat and vest again, stood attired in his Crimean shirt and moleskins — or, rather, Gower's, which certainly were not a 'pretty fit'—and surveyed himself with a peculiar smile before a twelve-inch square mirror hanging on the wall.

'A little less baggy,' he mused, 'I might call them swaddling clothes to begin Micola with.'

And then, remembering he was yet to be presented to Mrs. Gower, he slipped his coat over the Bush swaddling to hide its inelegance as much as possible, and gave many additional little touches to his toilette, of which he might have been careless had no lady ruled at the Micola homestead. But the coat, setting well

to his figure, and being of a smart patrol cut, gave him a piebald appearance—city and country unevenly marked—in the dining-room, where Alec stood ready to introduce him to Mrs. Gower, who was already seated at the head of the long dining-table, from which hot savoury odours were rising to fill the room and pleasantly assail Roland's olfactory sense, and accentuate that sinking within him till it was sharply revealed as hunger, and hailed as a friend from whom he had been some time parted.

In addition to Mrs. Gower, he met two young men who had preceded him by a year on the station, and who hitherto had been strangers to each other; each the younger son of a wealthy father, a consignment from England, and a fully initiated Jack-eroo.

Mrs. Gower was a tall, bony lady, with angular shoulders, pasty complexion, and reddish brown hair loosely coiled, from which a few stray wisps were supposed to form a curl, allowed to dangle on each side of a long neck from behind her ears; the style suggested freedom of habit, but did not counteract a prim and discreet manner. Her features were homely, but not unpleasant, for she was one

kindly disposed, and her face declared it more often than not, and so she had won her husband's homage to herself and her servants' fealty.

But the stock of white servants in the Bush is mostly scanty, and calls for the sometimes rough and untrained help of the dark children of the soil. Micola could only boast of two of the former, a married couple, with a gin and two or three black boys under them for the heaviest work, and Mrs. Gower over all as chief.

Mrs. Gower could achieve marvellous things by her industry at the culinary workshop ; she could outdo Mrs. Beeton, and had been somewhat flurried this day in her anxiety to excel herself that she might serve a dinner to young Mr. Goldwin at which Epicurus himself could not complain.

She had imagined him to be a spoiled child of fortune, always to be humoured ; but as soon as she saw him, bowing, and courteous as he could be, he gave one of his winning smiles again, in a moment of happy oblivion, which advanced for him at once a successful suit for her favour and gained another friend. But there followed a more powerful appeal still than a whole army of graces and gallant attributes,

and that was his evident satisfaction with the fare provided, for he ate and drank like a hungry hearty man, as he had not done since misfortune had nigh crushed him.

Dyspepsia had held him for its own—wrested from him a naturally healthy appetite, to give him in its stead what Carlyle in the dyspeptic grip has referred to as an ‘infernial apparatus.’

A dusty, tedious train journey, and a long trot through the Bush, with only a light sandwich or so to keep him from absolute fasting on the way, had restored to Roland a wholesome craving for food ; the restoration exorcised for the nonce not only the incidents of the Grey-cott Arms, but all the effects of Titania’s liveliness, and the difficulty of his own changed position.

Comparatively he was happy, then ; superlatively Mrs. Gower was entranced, and needed no outspoken praise, which was not unusual from her husband and the young men present, for the manner in which the fatted calf had been prepared.

Heroes are but human, and this fact is proclaimed to the reader now as Roland revels in the consciousness of a sound digestion again—a rare appetite and the wherewithal to appease it.

Stimulated with food and generally pleased and grateful, his tongue loosened, and he did something else besides eat and drink : he began to talk in his own old bright way, and kept his companions interested in all things that he touched upon.

‘He is a grand young fellow—a gentleman if you like.’ It was Mrs. Gower who made this declaration, later on, to her lord, when Roland, tired and sleepy, was already far away in the land of dreams, and they were retiring. ‘Talk about your English lads, indeed, after him!’

‘H’m, h’m,’ said Alec, with a polite acquiescence merely, and no enthusiasm. ‘He is guid eno’ to look at and listen to, but I can’t quite make him out. He is close with his bawbees a wee bit ; but maybe he’ll ken better soon what’s expected of a weel-to-do mon in these parts.’ Alec was thinking of the six-penny drink at the Greycott Arms, which he had paid for ; he had not grudged it, but he would rather, for the credit of the station, that Goldwin had repressed the evident repugnance which Crook and Miss Saucebox had evoked, and been more politic in the matter of doing as Rome did, he being in Rome, and, moreover, with a heavy purse, which should have

opened wide instead of being closely buttoned up under his city-cut coat, as it was supposed to be. 'He's just come in for his own,' continued Gower; 'but you'd think he was as straitened as a mon steeped in debt; and then, agen, he has coom to do the Jackeroo business, he says, and what for? I'd like to know what for, when he's no' made for the like, and can't sit Titania better than a bairn in petticoats. If it wasn't for all his clever talk I'd say——' Alec hesitated as he noted something aggressive in his wife's manner.

'Well?' she said.

'He was a bit daft.' Alec finished his remark with an accompanying illustration by touching his forehead significantly with his fingers.

'It's a shame for you to think or say such a thing of a fine noble lad like that. Daft because he is pleased to amuse himself at playing Bushman? And as for "being close with his bawbees," I don't see that you've had time to judge yet'—Mrs. Gower knew nothing of the sixpenny drink—'and if he is, the more honour to him, perhaps. A gentleman doesn't fling his money on all sides of him to flaunt his position in everybody's eyes and advertise his wealth. That's my opinion.'



Thus Mrs. Gower, as she held her brush aloft, suspended in its action of brushing up her hair for the night, to dwindle to a tight little knot on the top of her head.

‘Weel a weel,’ responded Gower, who seldom cared to differ from his wife, whose opinions he respected as he did her domestic ability, ‘dinna be fashed about it. The Captain says he is a braw boy, so we’ll abide by the Captain.’ But Alec was not fully satisfied for all that, and said to himself, ‘Time will tell.’

Time was not long in telling him that there was a method in the young millionaire’s madness. Gower was a shrewd man, but, shrewd as he was, he could never have had by simple close observation the remotest idea of the actual facts upon which the method was based. It was arranged that he should show Roland the next morning around, and make him acquainted with the run, the yards, and the men. But Roland was not up with the sun, for when the breakfast-bell rang at eight o’clock he was still stretched in slumber, and Mrs. Gower took care that he should have his breakfast like a lord, quite a couple of hours later, when all station-hands were out and at work.

Her kindness and hospitality were not lost upon him ; nevertheless, the sweetness of both

was somewhat neutralized with a touch of gall.

It was, perhaps, a natural thing that one so ultra-sensitive should at the slightest attention received over and above the ordinary demand on courtesy flinch as though a raw wound, bandaged and hidden, had been inadvertently set bleeding afresh by too active a physical demonstration of friendship.

The night previous, the sense of comfort brought by the kindly genial faces met, and the welcome board and bed, had stilled for a time the throbbing of that wound, had exorcised the skeleton which he could never shut away in the cupboard, but which persisted in standing continuously behind his shoulder, always to cast its shadow about him more or less, but never so heavy as when the glare of millionaire homage seemed to be strongest.

Mrs. Gower's ministrations were made to the man, not to the millionaire; for Roland's attractions did not entirely depend upon his position; his athletic, graceful figure, his manliness, contradicting the effeminate softness of a boyish, hairless face; his gentleness, his talk, his chivalry, and, above all, his capacity for doing justice to her culinary ability, had won her heart; yet, unknown to herself, it is just

possible that the millionaire glory intensified the attractions of the man. Such a ruddy background of a literally golden light, the blaze of sovereigns piled, built up like a throne on a dais for a handsome young man to recline upon, must work its influence upon the human mind. And Mrs. Gower was human ; the glint of the gold touching her guest became a nimbus, in which the skeleton, all unseen, mocked and grinned.

It was this skeleton which urged Roland to put forth a strange request to Alec Gower when they were together, the lordly breakfast having been disposed of, and on their way to the paddocks afoot.

‘Ask fifty, sir,’ said Alec, in response to Roland’s ‘I have a favour to ask.’

‘I need not test your goodwill with fifty of them,’ replied Roland, with a settled gravity on his features ; ‘I shall ask but one. I want you to understand that I am here to work, if I can. I want no distinction between me and the two young fellows I met at your table. They eat there—so shall I ; but they sleep elsewhere, and so shall I. You call them Smithson and John-del, I think ; call me Rol. You don’t know how much it would please me if you would all call me Rol, and leave “Mr. Goldwin” and

“sir” alone. I am here as a sort of station-hand to do honest Bush-work or station-work, or whatever I can, for a time, and it doesn't fit in with the “sir” and the distinction you and your good wife desire to show.’

He spoke with a nervous rapidity, which sometimes tripped him up in his words and forced a stutter. He was longing to forget the name of Goldwin if he could, and sink his false personality in an easy familiarity and the outdoor labour of which he knew nothing.

‘Your wish shall be law, sir—I beg pardon—Rol. You see, it fashes one a bit at the first, but we'll drop doon to it, no fear aboot that.’

Alec said this with respectful obedience to one upon whom he looked as his master, but could not resist a halt for a second to fix a searching eye upon the young man's countenance, with his words to his wife suddenly recurring to his mind :

‘I'd say he was a bit daft.’

Roland, unequal to dissimulation, coloured under the scrutiny, which was irritating, and walked on. When he spoke again it was to touch upon matters quite apart from himself.

‘Shall we see the ensilage pits to-day?’ he asked.

‘Not much to see,’ answered Alec; ‘but if

rain don't coom soon, ye'll see the jewel we get from them. Jest jewel-boxes they are: big, tight, dry wells—dry as a bone, packed with the fodder and corn. There it is, sweet and fresh as the day it was put in. The poor beasts need no' tremble for drought. We'll cut across to Barney's hut directly, and we'll get the horses looked up; it'll be a quicker way to do the overlooking to-day, Mr. Goldwin — Rol, I mean. Darn me! but it's as slippery to catch hold on as a drap of quicksiller. I think I'd run a wild bull into the yard by mysel' better.'

He cast another queer look at his companion, which was unseen.

'Mr. Larry has told me a great deal about the success of the pits,' said Roland.

'Ay; he goes in for them himsel'.

'Who is his manager?'

'He's been his own manager for twenty year—or thinks he has been. All the same, he relies upon an overseer. The Washington run is only second to Micola. Your father called it after the old chap, and Larry bought it in later years. What do ye think of him? If he thinks as much about your father's son as he did of your father, ye've got a friend stanch as steel.'

Roland evaded a reply to this remark by putting an irrelevant question:

‘When do you shear?’

‘Soon. Seen the machines ever?’

‘No; but I’ve read of them.’

‘Weel, they’ll be a curiosity for such as ye. We country folks are getting used to ’em, though they’re not in use all round, but will be by-and-by. A mon with an ounce of brains will have the machine before the old shears. When ye see for yoursel’, ye’ll jest think the same. Snip, snip, snip, over, under, and everywhere in a cat-loup, and the creature stands stripped of its fleece as clean as a banana nicely peeled, and a’most as quick done too. If the sheep weren’t such idiots, they’d show surprise.’

‘And what about the men thrown out of employment by the machine, for, of course, you don’t need so many hands?’

‘Weel, they get odd jobs aboot, if they’re willing to work. I gie them a chance when I can, but they do a power of grumbling all the same. They’d hang on to the old slow-going business, and put a spoke in the squatter’s wheel if they could. They hate him, and hate the machines that wise heads have invented for his prosperity. They’d strike at the root of them.’

‘We can scarcely blame them,’ said Roland,

ready to sympathize with the side of labour. 'Remember that too often invention strikes at the root of labour's calling. It has been proved—well proved—that the swifter the science of machinery advances, the stronger the grip of poverty fastens on the toiler, who finds his occupation swept away by the advance. The world is none the happier for the genius that works to enrich the few and starve the many: it is not unlike a torpedo thrown to catch fish, regardless of the destruction of hundreds for the sake of a desired haul of luscious food.'

'H'm, h'm,' said Alec. 'Vera guid, sir—Rol, I mean—but you haven't seen much of the world yet. It's a mighty race-course, and the "battle is not to the swift, nor the race to the strong, but time and chance doth happen to them all." A guid mon said that who knew summat of human nature, too; and there were rich and poor in his days, and there's rich and poor noo; and there'll be rich and poor always, invention or no invention. One mon is bound to push on, and another gets trampled on—that's the way of it. Advance there must be.'

'Advance by all means, if we can do it *without* the trampling—if redress can be made to those left behind hungry and wretched.'

'Weel, Mr. Gol——, er——' Alec hesitated



at the forbidden name, and, with another tentative glance at Roland, said : ' A millionaire can put straight much that is crooked ; he can lift up the trampled.'

Roland flushed painfully. That crown of prosperity, glittering for him as it had been in the distance before he attained his majority, he had promised himself should not overweight his brain, but be relieved of its superfluous gems for the benefit of a class. He had looked upon his wealth much in the same way as a devoted mother delights in that sustenance which is hers only to sustain. Now his resignation of the crown, for honour's sake, yet made head and heart ache when he missed its weight. Alec's remark sent a quiver of pain through him, but saving for a flush he made no sign, and said with a certain pathos :

' I would not hamper worthy ambition, but yet I sigh for the old time when luxury was not necessity, and the fig-tree stood ready for the man to sit beneath and smoke his pipe of peace, if he chose to remain there and let others battle for progress.'

' Bah !' cried Gower impatiently, ' the old time had its fermentation, for all its fig-trees. The women worried over their gew-gaws to outdo each other then as noo, I don't doot,

and the mon who had one fig-tree envied his neighbour who had two or three of them. No, no ; mon is a restless animal ; he ain't satisfied with his limbs given ; he'd like wings, and some day science 'll gie them to him, and then he'll be fashed because he can't get as far as the moon with a pick and a shovel to prospect there for gold. But here we are at Barney's. I s'pose he's off with the lads, but you shall have a peep.'

Alec, unceremoniously entering, bade Roland follow, and both men passed the threshold of what had once been the manager's own quarters, and with which he had learned to be discontented.

'My drawing-room,' he said by way of introduction, and waving one of his big hairy hands, 'and kitchen in one. Noo it is Barney's.'

The 'drawing-room' floor was of ant-bed, which, when crushed to powder and mixed with water, hardens like cement ; the walls were papered at intervals with woodcuts from illustrated periodicals and some painted almanacs, which served to partly conceal the ungainly fissures of the slabs and curtain their ugliness. Opposite the doorway just passed there was a huge fireplace, backed and flanked with rusty tin, where logs smouldered beneath

their débris of cinders, and an improvised crane protruded with a hanging kettle; an empty billy-can, rolled on its side, reposed perilously near the logs; and suspended from the bark-roof were a couple of smoked hams—a present to Barney from Mrs. Gower—and a big dilly-bag—an elongated basket of plaited rushes of aboriginal manufacture—filled with onions. A carbine stood upright in one corner, and in another was built a three-cornered cupboard—a diminutive store-house for the stowing away of tea, sugar, flour, matches, and an odd bottle of draught-whisky, with a few tins of jam and potted fish; on the top of the cupboard was a litter—a metal candlestick, holding half a candle, with stalactitic grease drooping about it and caked on the metal; an empty salmon-tin converted into a tobacco-jar, an open jack-knife, and a couple of pipes, well stained with use, and evidently carelessly tossed there to lie grovelling within a hillock of dirty-white ash tumbled from the bowls.

In the centre of the ant-bed floor there stood a table of planks on four squat-like studdings acting as legs, while by the fire, which still gave heat, there lay something curled, having no shape in particular, but a decided odour, mingling with the faint exhalation of the

hams and strong scent of onions, to breed a peculiar atmosphere, which Gower anathematized and Roland shrank from.

‘You black villain with lazy bluid, clear out o’ this!’ said Alec, addressing the ‘curled something’ with a raised voice and a slight application of his right foot, which had the effect of a sudden uncurling of the ‘villain,’ a little wriggle, and then a leap to reveal the full figure of a half-clad black boy, dazed with heavy sleep, and staring stupidly at the two white men, with his hands at his mop of wiry black hair, and ten scratching fingers running through it. His teeth, even and white—whiter by contrast with their ebony framing—suddenly gleamed with the rolling back of his thick lips as sleepiness was driven away and he recognised the overseer, of whom he did not seem afraid, for he grinned as he stood before him, with his naked feet and lean calves protruding from a cast-off pair of riding-breeches, and with a soiled guernsey, gaping at the chest, for body covering.

‘Sprightly plenty work along a mornin’, masser; me plenty tired,’ he began by way of apology.

‘Baal too much work,’ replied Gower. ‘You too much lazy. Murry mickey, noo, and catch yarraman for two feller masser; this is another

feller masser'—here Gower pointed to Roland, whose face was full of interest - 'he want to mell mell all about ; murry mickey, noo.'

Alec's mixture of broad Scotch and black's dialect first provoked a smile from Roland, and next irresistibly a hearty laugh, which Sprightly was quick to echo with a yawning mouth and a second free display of ivory. He evidently was accustomed to gentle kicks and high words, which he knew meant no harm. As a proof of his trust in the good-fellowship of the overseer, he deliberately asked for 'bacca,' whereupon the latter drew a tobacco-fig from his pouch and a knife from his pocket, cut off an inch or so of the fig, tossed it to the petitioner, who caught it as a monkey would a nut, and again bade him 'murry mickey,' meaning, 'make haste.'

'Is he one of the station hands?' inquired Roland as he watched the retreating figure of the black boy, now agile enough with its supple lean limbs, as he went on his mission to catch the horses.

'Of a sort,' replied Alec. 'We call him Barney's man—he brought him up from a bairn ; and we also call him Sprightly, jist because he isn't sprightly, and will sleep like a dormouse. But he's a splendid tracker for the stray cattle.'

and he's a faithful cub. They make pretty good servants, if trained weel, the niggers, and treated weel ; gie them enough to eat—plenty tucker, or “parter,” as they call it—a bit o' tobacco, a red handkerchief, or a shirt, and some o' them'll work like troopers.'

‘And is there no trace of cannibalism?’

‘Not in our lot ; they're mild as sheep, the poor deevils, if they're only let alone, and don't bear us a grudge because we've taken their country from them to help push on the world. If your father and others like him, Mr. Gol—— I beg your pardon, Rol—had been content to sit under one fig-tree, North Flindersland would no' be Knutsford noo, and going on its own hook. You see, we had to trample on the road ; it's part and parcel of the programme. To reach a certain point we have to jostle and be jostled ; those who can't steer themsel' ought no' to complain of those who can, even if they do go to the wall. I've had plenty hard knocks in my time, but if we want to get on we must put up with that.'

Roland said nothing to this ; he was thinking of his own ‘hard knock,’ and whether he would be compelled to jostle others, in order to reach the goal he desired.

‘And noo,’ added Gower, pointing to a door-

way in the side-wall, where a shabby piece of cretonne (relegated to Barney from the Gower cottage) dangled and flapped as substitute for a door, 'in there's Barney's bedroom—once mine—and I don't think there is much to see in it but untidiness; and while we're waiting for Sprightly I'll show you to the station-house, where the boys sleep, and where you can sleep, too, if you don't care about putting up at the home; but, mind, if it should no' be to your liking, coom back to us—the guid wife will keep the room for ye.'

So saying, he turned from Barney's cabin to lead Roland towards the old station-house, which was a long, narrow building, with roughly-constructed verandas back and front, and with quite a suite of rooms. Here the Jackeroos slept, and Gower proceeded to point out one room in particular, which should be portioned to Roland if he persisted in sleeping there too. From this he drew him to a long, low scullery-like room, whose scent proclaimed its dedication to harness and leather appurtenances generally, without the full display of saddles, whips, bridles and girths.

Here Alec Gower commenced to select saddles, etc., for the equipment of the horses when Sprightly should bring them, and Roland,



anxious to begin doing something, helped him unasked. But when they were on their horses there was little time but for a superficial inspection of the many things Roland had been desirous to give close observation to—the pits and the shearing-machines, the cattle-yards and slaughter-pens, the shepherds' huts, and the storehouse.

Alec gave up his time entirely to him this first day, which was filled in till sundown with a swift survey and much explanation.

Roland's keen interest, and his apparent eagerness to set to work with those taper-fingered, filbert-nailed white hands of his, went far to win Alec's esteem and incline him to overlook the parsimony which he had condemned to his wife.

And Roland enjoyed that night another hearty meal, and was not disposed to quarrel with the place, which to him was as a city of refuge.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE GOLD-STREAKS IN THE ORE.

THE third night after Roland's coming to Micola he was in his own room of the old station-house, where he chose to sleep, and was busy at his desk, set on a spindle-shanked deal table with no covering but a scattering of loose writing-paper, and where a strong light fell from the kerosene lamp suspended immediately above his head, to glint on the ripples of his hair, on his young face, now indented with thought, as he bent forward, pen in hand, and commenced a letter beginning with 'Dear Una, dearest friend,' the completion of which was about to be deferred through an unexpected interruption.

He was unaware that he was not alone, that a pair of eyes sunken in their bilious caverns and framed in a network of wrinkles were fixed upon him, filled with pain, yet misty, and

gleaming in tenderness and reverence—that an old white-haired man was standing in the doorway leaning on a heavy stick, as if for support to a nervous body, shaking not alone with age, for agitation shook his limbs, and his lips quivered, as he announced himself with a deep-toned, melancholy ‘Ah!’

Roland, in spite of Una’s defence, was immediately alive to an unwelcome presence, and faced the intruder with sternness, biting at his lip to arrest the bitter greeting that would assuredly have gone forth but for the bent white head and evident infirmity appealing to respect. He felt that Washington Larry’s gaze was a burning-glass to consume, red-hot with the hatred and contempt ever nursed for anyone of the Lockstud blood. His behaviour, as Una had observed in her letter, was calculated to favour the impression that a boasted friendship, founded upon a supposed relationship to the beloved Jerry, had fallen through on the removal of that basis; for since learning the full truth from the lawyer, who before disclosure had exacted a promise of secrecy, he had held himself distantly and seemingly proved his aversion. The Captain, all sympathy and earnestness, had come forward to press immediate aid and show irritation because

it was refused. But Larry had avoided touching the hand of the lad for whom he had professed a personal fondness—had never offered one word of pity. Full of loathing and revenge, he had even growled out his regret that his word had been passed to maintain silence, and he muttered something like a threat to break it, that he might give publicity to the crime revealed in a whisper, to work it up to a roar for the outside world, and see the two people he had hunted down in the past safe in the hands of justice and steeped in disgrace. Yet Roland was in error, and Una the clearer-sighted, and the melancholy ‘Ah!’ vibrated with a pathos of its own, carried quaveringly into his opening speech :

‘Drop that look, youngster. It ain’t that way you have always greeted the old man.’

Roland, frigid, found voice and said :

‘You surely have made a mistake in coming here. This is not the manager’s residence.’

‘Hang the manager!’ snapped Larry, with a thump of his stick on the floor. ‘I’ve not come out of my way to see him. I only want to see you, and Barney directed me here.’ He stepped up to the deal table and put out his hand. ‘Come, give us your fist, boy.’

As this was quite an unexpected advance from one supposed to be hating him heartily, and ready to avoid him, Roland, slightly relaxing, could scarcely be churlish enough to resent it.

‘That’s right,’ continued Larry, with Roland’s fingers, not yet responsive, gripped in a steel-like clasp. ‘You’re not goin’ to send me off to Gower with that ’igh and mighty hoity toity, that don’t belong to you no more than—no more than——’

Here, floundering for a comparison, Roland interjected, with a touch of sarcasm :

‘Than the name I go by does, perhaps you would say.’

‘No, I wasn’t goin’ to say it ; but, as you’ve said it, let it stand. I wasn’t goin’ to throw that in your teeth.’

‘No?’ said Roland, now thawing fast, and feeling self-rebuked. ‘Well, sit down.’ He placed the one chair of the room at his visitor’s disposal, and waited till he was seated, with his thick stick upright between his knees, upon which he steadied both his hands, holding on as if it were a hauling-rope. Roland carefully shut to the door and began to walk up and down the little room before he continued. ‘Tell me,’ he asked, ‘why you have behaved so strangely—why you come now to see a

creature who has unfortunately fallen in your esteem, but through no fault of his own ?'

Larry looked as if he were on the point of crying, but he did not show tears, and Roland went on :

'You have shunned me like a pestilence—a walking pestilence!—because I am befouled with the pitch of the pit in which I have been reared. Or is it because I, of the family of the man you detest, am still compelled, for the honour of an innocent, unoffending woman, with children around her, to retain a false name, one to which I have no claim whatever—one that you love? I would save *her* the disgrace, but the bearing of that name is a constant torture to me. I call for pity, not contempt.'

A lean yellow hand went up from the stick, as if to entreat for mercy.

'No, you're not Jerry's son,' said the old man, in a muffled tone, as though something was sticking in his throat, 'else you'd know me better. You'd know I've just been mad, upside-down, flabbergasted, but not with you. I kep' a tight 'old on myself *not* to see you till I got my senses back, for I knew it was not your fault, and I was afeard I should burst—split—after givin' my word that I'd keep mum. But who would ha' guessed what it

was that old Tackerline and Pennacove had to tell? I got away somewhere, and shut myself up to curse and swear hard and fast. To be told you was somebody else, with *his* blood in your veins, and not Jerry's at all, struck me all of a 'eap, and to think that I hadn't moved heaven and earth to stop his marrying that yaller-haired witch—to think how she had been gulling us all, and been cheatin' him in his grave, too! I felt like poisonin' myself to get the mad feeling done with; and yet with it all I never split. Do you know why?

'Because you had given your word to keep quiet.'

'No. I'd ha' broke my word, and thought it no harm, neither, to bring a pair of evil birds down to the dust. I kep' quiet because of *you*—because, Jerry's boy or not Jerry's boy, you made me cotton to you the first time I clapped eyes on you—because it was over Jerry's grave we first shook hands: I can't forget that—because you paid him a son's duty and gave him a son's love: I can't forget that—and I can't forget as how you've willin'ly beggared yourself to do the square thing by me and the Captain. You're a plucky youngster, and, thunder! I'm proud of you, I am, in spite of the blood in your veins, which strikes me has been



well filtered somehow, and—hold 'ard awhile, youngster'—this was interpolated to prevent Roland's interruption, for, halting in his walk, he opened his lips to speak. 'Hold 'ard, I've got more to say. I've been dazed, and not able to sleep a wink or enjoy a bite. To see *him* and *her* yoked in a prison van, bound for quod, would have seemed like their real deserts, and I'd ha' danced after the van ; but you wouldn't let me—it was you held me back, and it's you that has brought me 'ere to-night.' Larry rose rather feebly, and took a step or two forward, dropped his stick, and laid both his hands on Roland's breast, peering into his face as he had at Jerry's grave, as he went on solemnly : ' Jerry's spirit is in you. I see him last night as I see him last, hugging his own baby when he was on his death-bed, only he wasn't hugging nobody ; he was standing upright in the room at Bachelor's Nest, just like old times, and his right hand pointed to a sort of cloud that stood on a level with his shoulder, and then rose above him like a mist, and slowly cleared away to show what it hid, for with the lifting of the mist I see the face and figure of a young man, at first like a shadow, and then all clear. It was *you* ! and Jerry, pointing, spoke. " Wash," he said, just in the old way,

“this boy is my heir, and no other.” There! I see it all as certain as I’m a livin’ man this night. Now, I’m not a sooperstitious man, but that wasn’t no dream, youngster, but a vision like Adam had when angels climbed the ladder. It was a warning; it brought me to my senses; it said: “Wash, touch a penny of that money and be cursed; it belongs to that lad who has been called by my name all these years, and who has earned it.” Now you see why the money worrits me, don’t you? The next-of-kin business is all humbug. *I* know, and the Captain knows, there ain’t likely to be found next-of-kin—never mind why. Very well, in that case the money, two-thirds of it—and it’s a big property now, let me tell you—will be his and mine. Well, I don’t want mine; it must be yours, or Jerry won’t rest in his grave. I’ve got enough, and more than enough, and Jerry knows it. I’m an old feller now, nigh seventy year; what do *I* want of more money?’

His hands, palsied with emotion, went from their resting-place up to the shoulders of the lad whom he was desirous to befriend at the instigation of a dream, and who was so overcome that for a moment reply was denied to him. He caught at the wrinkled, withered hands, bearing upon him to draw them down

for a fierce, impassioned clasp within his own, while a spasm passed over his features to sweep all colour away and leave his face white and troubled. Conscience-stricken for having harboured anything like vindictive feeling against one whose whole aim was to be his benefactor, and to hide the benefaction behind a mere dream--the confused result of day-thought, perhaps he was compelled to realize the truth of the text: 'For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.' The coals blazed now, and a knot of pain at his throat was forced from its hold there that he might speak, though with difficulty.

'I don't deserve this. I have maligned you in my heart. Misfortune is no misfortune if it can bring a man the friends I have found. Pray forgive me! I don't deserve it—I don't deserve such friendship as this from you.'

'Bah!' came a guttural interjection, meant to be passionate, but so choked as to be muffled. Larry was fain to wrench one of his hands from Roland's to search for a red handkerchief, which, after diligently applying to his nostrils to disperse breath-obstruction, he drew across his eyes before he continued: 'Don't be a child; what have I got to forgive, unless you worrit me with strong-headedness? Promise to take the thing and make no bones about it.'

‘Then I must ask your forgiveness again,’ returned Roland sadly, ‘for I must not—cannot take it! Don’t tempt me.’

Larry pulled his remaining hand away impatiently, and Roland stooped to restore him his stick, which once again became a prop as the old man, standing, leaned forward on it and showed a face clouded with disappointment.

‘Why?’ he began reproachfully. ‘I know why. You won’t be beholden to a stale old fungus; you are too proud to take anything from such as me.’

‘No—no.’ Roland folded his arms across his chest and resumed his walk to and fro. ‘You must not be hurt with me because my principles recoil from an acceptance of ease and plenty under existing circumstances. Can’t you understand that I feel it a positive duty to wipe out the sin that has been forced upon me—the sin of a man for whom I am filled with pity and shame? My future action must atone for past wrongs. Your generosity and the Captain’s seem to increase the debt still on your books against me, must increase my gratitude, my determination not to impose on you. Every honest man likes to pay his debts. Would you deprive me of the satisfaction in attempting to do this now by carving out a new line for myself? I will work and win a name for myself—not on the

station ; I am here for physical work, to kill mental strain, to recruit exhausted energy. When I am steadier nerved and well recruited, I intend to try the law for a profession, and then I shall feel on the way to paying off every farthing I owe to the estate, and not till then shall I be happy.'

Larry, unable to answer this, turned away to his chair again, there, with his forehead on his stick, to ponder for a few seconds. Presently he lifted his white head, and said with renewed eagerness :

'You're not proud ; you're strong-headed—you ought to be Jerry's boy for that. How are you going to get into the law without money ? You can't see ahead a bit, so you're not his boy. You can't stir a peg anywheres without money.'

'Then you shall help me in my own way.' Roland said this as if with sudden inspiration. He was anxious to pacify Larry, and to show him he was not too proud to accept his aid. 'You have offered to give up everything of your bequest to enrich me. It is impossible to tell you how it has moved me, how unworthy I feel of the kindness, how grateful I shall ever be. It is painful to think that you should misunderstand at all my reasons for refusing such

munificence ; let us compromise the matter. I will ask of you a loan to help me on—only a loan, to be repaid when I get a sure footing.'

'Let it be that,' responded Larry, suddenly brightening up, with a grim smile playing under his jungle of beard. He was thinking it probable that he should have 'a sure footing' in the grave before the loan could be wiped off, and that death would make his wish imperative, and this boy, who clung to honour so persistently, a rich man, if not a millionaire. 'Let it be that if you won't take it as a gift.'

'The loan itself will demand more than repayment in money ; it will demand a life-long gratitude,' said Roland, with much earnestness. 'Did you know that Captain Pennacove was likewise anxious to aid me ? He wanted me to remain in Phillipia—to be his guest, his adopted son—wanted me to accept a princely present from him. Well, I refused him as I have refused you.'

'I didn't know then. I only know we was both grumpy alike over the whole business, and almost wished you hadn't found it out. Only *she's* turned off from Goolgun, and *he's* known for what he is by you ; that's a sort o' comfortin'. And I know you're as blind as any old owl.'

'Woefully blind,' Roland at once admitted.

‘Blind!’ went on Larry. ‘Can’t you see what the old chap’s driving at? It’s all as straight as a big A B C. There’s a young woman that’ll have you for the asking. Why don’t you fix it up between you? She’ll get the Captain’s share and all that comes at the back of it, and you get *her*. There! don’t you see? Things might go on jest as before, only with the riddance of the yaller-haired witch.’

Larry was still under the impression that Una’s affection was centred where he would have it centred, and it seemed to him that Roland only wanted a nudge or two to urge him on to this inviting outlet from a sore dilemma.

But Roland, having been told by Una to woo another, could not believe it possible that she loved him. Even if he had so believed, he would not have dared to seek her as his wife now that his position was so marvellously, painfully changed. She was still his dear friend—sister, counsellor, with no hope of ever being nearer and dearer.

He made no answer. To argue the subject with anybody who could think him capable of rushing into matrimony as an easy means of accepting what he deemed a charity, and soothing the pride that forbade him taking it any

other way, was repugnant; and he felt that Larry could not understand his scruples, so he passed over his well-meant advice, and only sighed as his eyes fell on his desk and the letter just begun with 'My dear Una.' Strange to say, Larry also looked in the direction of the desk with a new interest. Having dropped his hints, he allowed them to sink like seed in the earth, convinced they would rise in leaf and flower in time, and expected no immediate budding. But he watched the young man's set face, and heard him sigh, and he followed his eyes to the table and letter, which recalled to him that he had another topic to touch upon.

'There's something else I have to say,' he began again, the first to break the pause. 'I've got a desk at home; I never use it but for cheque-books and odd bills.'

'Yes,' said Roland, glad to speak of other things.

'Yes, and there's somethin' in it that's a puzzle.'

'A secret drawer?'

'No, a secret packet. I've had it over twenty year.'

'And still a secret?'

'That's just it. That's what took me to



Phillipia. Your majority done it. I knew I wasn't far out, so I went down to be with you and see what you was made of, and to give it you just as Jerry wished.'

'Give it to me! What have I to do with it?'

'Everything or nothing,' answered Larry mysteriously; 'and that has helped to worrit me, for it is addressed to "Roland Kovodel Goldwin, my son;" and Jerry it was that writ it, and put it into my hands the week he died, to give his boy when he was twenty-one years and two months old; and I went down to Phillipia to give it, and couldn't, because——'

'That boy died.' Roland finished the sentence, as Larry stumbled in shaping his thoughts.

'That boy died; yes,' repeated the old man; 'and that's why it worrits me. Will you read it?'

'I? By what right?'

'Of circumstances, maybe. You've been a kind of adopted son, after all, and who knows that he looked to his boy to do something else with his money when a growed-up man?' He looked anxiously up in Roland's face, and said again, in an appealing way: 'Will *you* take it and read it?'

‘It is rather a difficult request to meet.’ Roland’s features seemed to reflect the trouble on Larry’s. ‘This packet may contain something he did not wish any but his own to know.’

‘He would treat you as his own if he could rise this minute,’ urged Larry. ‘And there *is* something in it not meant for everybody to know. There was a secret in his life, and he writ it down, he told me, for his boy to read ; but there might be something else, too, for all we know.’

‘Keep it a little longer, and we will consult Tackerline. I certainly will not read it on my own responsibility.’

‘I thought of him, but wanted to see you first. I’m an old feller ; I might kick the bucket any day, and the packet will go to Tackerline then. “You keep it,” said Jerry to me, “but if anything happens give it over to John Tackerline—not unless.” So I’m livin’ yet, and I’ve kep’ it, but don’t want to keep it longer. The boy died, so it’s no more use to him than to me—to the lawyer, I mean. It will be thrown in the fire unread, and that worrits me, too. I’m afeard he might wish something done. Do me this favour, youngster : ride with me to Washington, and take it in your own hands ; it is safer with you than

me. I ain't goin' to ask you to read it if it goes against your grain, but jest to take it from me and lock it in that desk of yourn until you or me can see Tackerline, or both of us.'

'If it will relieve you, the least I can do is to take it into custody. If Tackerline thinks it an unlawful proceeding, why, we can only burn it, especially as it contains a family secret.'

'I don't like to think of its burning; if he thinks it unlawful, it shall be buried with me, as the secret of his life has been. He done a lot of good, and many a man has done worse things than that one slip of his. He told me all about it, and there was no call for him to tell it. The Captain knowed everything, and was a friend to him, too; that's why he never forgot the Captain. But Jerry and me was close as brothers; he never had a livin' creature to love him as I loved him, and he knowed it, he knowed it—poor old Jerry!'

Larry shook his white head mournfully, and then rose heavily from his chair, emitting a slight grunt with the effort, as he bent on his stick, for recent illness had told upon his constitution, and he had suffered much over the peculiar turn of Roland's life and the escape of Lockstud and Mrs. Goldwin from justice.

But he looked happier now that Roland had made two concessions.

He put out his hand to say good-bye, and added :

‘ You’ve done me a lot of good, lad. Thunder! I’ve had a big shakin’ with it all ; only I’m tougher than I look, it would ha’ done for me. But you’ve promised to take help from me, and that packet, and now I feel better. I’ll see you to-morrow. I’m going to get a shake-down at Barney’s.’

‘ Not Gower’s?’ asked Roland in surprise.

‘ No. Barney’s is good enough for me, and there ain’t any Mrs. Barney knockin’ about. Gower don’t know I’m here yet. I rode to Barney’s, and he put up the horse, and expects me back. Good-bye.’

‘ It is dark ; the moon will rise late to-night. I will accompany you across the paddock.’

‘ No ; you go on with your writin’. I know my way blindfolded—better than you. Good-night.’

‘ Good-night,’ returned Roland, as he stood at his door and saw the old man, almost nimble with relief of mind, go out into the darkness and disappear.

‘ How the true metal glints now that the earth is sifted!’ murmured Roland, reseated at

his desk. But though ready to eulogize the higher nature just presented to him—the fine vein of gold embedded in the rough ore, the magnanimity anxious to overlook his kinship to the man loathed for years, and, not without reason, the benevolence that intensified the magnanimity—he was not so ready to be reconciled to the cause that compelled him to seek or take monetary help. Hitherto the dispenser of benefits, he was thenceforth to be the recipient.

His breast heaved with its maelstrom of emotion: pride grappled with gratitude and rebellion with submission, as he bowed his head over the letter, destined to remain unfinished that night, and sobbed out again the anguish of his spirit.

## CHAPTER V.

THE OLD SHEPHERD'S REMINISCENCE, AND 'A  
PLAIN, UNVARNISHED TALE.'

ROLAND had an unrefreshing sleep that night of Larry's visit which had compelled him to defer the continuation of his letter to Una. She had hinted that Lockstud was perhaps in need of his family's toleration or leniency, that he was being 'driven to do reckless things.' The word 'driven' was significant, and had set Roland pondering deeply when solitude was his. 'He must not be driven down, but uphill, if driven at all,' he decided; and acting upon this decision, he meant to say in his reply to her that he would try and use his influence in exciting a spirit of forgiveness as a possible means of salvation.

But before he could sit down to his desk again another letter reached him—not from Una, but from Mrs. Lockstud.

‘MY POOR DEAR BOY,’ it began,

‘I am a wretched correspondent, but you asked me to write to you, and what would I not do to please you? Bodily I am recovered; mentally not so. Can it be expected? My writing at all will convince you of the truth of the former, but the way of it the latter. My peace of mind has gone. My life has never been a very happy one, yet it was heaven in comparison with now. You are young and strong, and can better live down your troubles, but I am too feeble to surmount mine. I shall die, I fear, unforgiving, because I can’t forget. I am treating HIM so unwifely, and my heart feels hardened with its misery and shame! Nobody suspects that it is breaking, nobody knows of the cruel phantom that divides us, for we maintain a strict civility towards each other in the presence of strangers, and chilly silence when they are absent, and we keep up the play of giving out that Mrs. G—— has gone abroad because of desperate illness, the same having prevented her from visiting old friends or being visited by them, and all the time we know nothing of her movements. And, then, some curiosity is rife about our darling Jessie, who is supposed to have met with an accident, to be suffering from some internal injury, and to

be living at Aunt Jessie's for quiet's sake. The questions are torture, for they drag us into a network of untruths. Who is her doctor? they ask sometimes. We tell them Mrs. Calliport's, but we don't tell them Mrs. Calliport is her own doctor. Jessie doesn't need a doctor, poor child! only time and all our gentleness and love. She is stricken terribly; you would never know her, Rol—you would not indeed! God help her, and help me, too! But for Jack and Una and dear kind Aunt Jessie, I should lose my mind. The aunt is going to take Jessie away to Wondoo and from me, she says, to return her with health improved. Louise is at boarding-school, and knows nothing of our misery. Jack is my principal companion, and the misery seems to have knocked all the boy out of him; he is really growing more and more like you every day—that is, in manner—and is a stronghold for me. As to Una, she is to me what Ruth was to Naomi. She gives me all her spare time, and is goodness itself. She even tries to soften down the glaring sin which touches us all through HIM, and I find it so hard to show mercy, for I have suffered so much. I long to tell the world how blessed I might have been but for a vile woman's work and her



accomplice, and I am tongue-tied—hand-tied. I can't even sign myself by the title which is justly mine relative to you, but must be content to give my Christian name only. Oh, dear, dear boy, my heart-strings are wrung! my heart is full of prayer! God watch over you!

‘PRISCILLA.’

With the reading of this letter he drank in all the gall there concentrated, and writhed with the loathing renewed, like a man, and not the god to which the women who bewailed his misfortune had transfigured him.

When leaving Phillipia he had shaken Lockstud's hand, desirous to show forbearance, to bury the hatchet which had worked so much harm, but glad to put miles of sea and land between him and his father, and escape from a presence unloved—repellent. The humility and remorse, so palpable and so unexpected, which had met him from the outset of their acknowledged relations, had broken the lash of his just anger in its fall—had kindled something akin to compassion—had extracted the fiery sting from words which, charged with bitterness and wrath and ready to be slung as cutting stones, had become, under his impulsive pity, softened to actual tenderness. But

now the dominant passion of sympathy for the mother and sister so dear was peremptorily evoked, to let loose a fresh implacability against the man who shadowed both as the upas and not the natural gourd. Before theirs his own misery paled ; his soul darkened with the fierce riot of resentment and virulence, threatening to dethrone that divinity with which he had been credited, while his frame trembled with the quiver of the battle-ground.

‘Is it not the *lex talionis* that he should be scorned by his family as he would be by the world were the truth bruited abroad?’ he inwardly cried. ‘He wears the badge of felony on his flesh ; he ought to be breaking stones ; he is an eyesore to those who know him for what he is. Let him bow to the sod ! let him grovel in the dust !’

But through the storm a still, small voice whispered : ‘The deepest-dyed criminals may be led to a lasting repentance.’

‘With the dangling rope looming in the distance, the fear of death, the after-penalty we wot not of,’ he answered.

‘Not so, but with the grace of human love—human charity—with the assurance of our belief in their future expiation,’ rang out the voice clearer and stronger.

'Can forgetfulness of irreparable injury be possible to any but fools? To forgive is to forget,' he reasoned.

'To forgive is to remember our own frailties, to soar above them and touch heaven,' said the voice again.

'Then,' moaned Roland, with his face in his hands, 'I cannot soar so high; frailty overpowers me. Who am I—what am I—to preach the beauty of pardon or lenity to two disconsolate women, with my own heart fired with contempt and pitilessness?'

There is a certain little creature which, when irritated, has by provision of nature an obnoxious weapon of defence in the power of emitting a sickening odour capable of polluting atmosphere or food within several yards of its point of attack; so the vicious attributes of man, wilfully vented, spread to contaminate the temple of the soul. Roland's keen sense of the pure and impure was not slow to recognise this moral fetor as it existed in Mrs. Lockstud and was breathed through her letter to touch him; but, all the same, he was powerless to rid himself of the taint for a time, and until he could do so, desisted from writing to Una or Mrs. Lockstud.

Ultimately, and after calm meditation, he

wrote to the latter, and followed it up by a letter to Una, in which he said :

‘ I have done what you asked me to do—written to the dear little woman, whose name I need not mention, and advised conciliation of a kind. I have put my own feeling through a thorough analysis, and find alloy that makes the test unsatisfactory. Sympathy, excited by *his* evident contrition and self-abasement, impels me in my better moments to leniency, but real purity of sentiment is lacking. I could only propose a practical forbearance, which shall close its eyes to his past sin and her foul wrongs ; but exhort her to pardon full and free, pure and simple, I could not. Memory declines to be smothered, and forgiveness, without the necessary tenderness of oblivion, must be but a coldly chiselled imitation of the spirit of charity—a marble Psyche, an imperfect representation of a perfect grace—the asbestos that presumes to glow, yet has no warmth at its heart. Dear friend, know me for what I am : as far as withholding a decided judgment and a punishment of one’s own to fall on the culprit, I may be said to forgive, but no more.

‘ Mid’s suffering alone, if nothing else, forbids an impeccability to be pressed upon others when denied to myself. Reflection condemns

the stern and silent attitude of his wife and children towards him, and I have begged of her to evict hate if she can, and show gentleness and the mercy that may save a soul tottering on the borders of an unknown abyss.'

He said much more, but upon lighter subjects. He told her of his Bush life; described the Gowers and their home; gave her an outline of Larry's visit, with the additional fact now made known to the reader, that he had ridden with him to Washington Station, and was in possession of the packet, and wrote an exceedingly long letter, which helped to lighten his heart and to gladden hers.

It lightened his heart to pour out its grief and its sentiment to her in the sweet belief of her thorough understanding of both—to tell her that he had abided by her counsel in his endeavour to impress the necessity of renewed wifely devotion on Mrs. Lockstud. And it was well that he had chosen this free-and-easy outdoor life—the manual work to deaden all the black imps of misery that, like mechanical toys easily wound to activity, leaped to a wild war-dance by the mere touch of the key centred in thought. Rough, boisterous occupation gave no quarter to the brooding tendency, and so far wearied him that night brought desire for early

rest, and that dreamless slumber which the too active brain seldom attains. So some few weeks passed and he had ingratiated himself on the Micola run with all the station-hands—had been up with the sun, away to the cattle-yards, the slaughter-pen, the mustering of the beasts, and the draughting in the stock-yard; had even the daring to attempt the subjection of an evil-minded, wicked-heeled buck-jumper, and receive the inevitable thud on the broad of his back as a sequence; and had done other reckless things with an indifference and hardihood that made Mrs. Gower shiver and her husband remonstrate, while Roland himself seemed to care neither for peril nor disaster, but invited both.

His days filled in with station-work, and evenings often spent in Gower's drawing-room, enlivened by music or song, and perhaps a neighbour or two dropping in as guests, shifted for the nonce the weight of the imps, and aroused him to an enjoyment of passing impressions.

One night there gathered quite a little crowd in the Gower drawing-room to circle at the fireplace—the Australian nook already alluded to, with its pot-plants and marsupial draperies.

Folks of the Bush living within some few miles of each other are, by courtesy, neigh-

bours. Of these were Mr. and Mrs. Gratrak and their new governess, Mrs. Gower's successor. And there were Smithson and Johndel, and many station-hands, together with a superannuated shepherd, bowed, bent, shrivelled, and toothless. This last was a pensioner on Larry's station, and, originally employed by Jeremiah Goldwin, was at his death taken up as a *protégé* by Larry, and with or without Larry was ever made welcome at Micola. He was very old indeed, and they called him Jacob. His appearance favoured the name, it being of the patriarchal order, for his snow-white beard fell to his waist, and a scanty silky fringe of snow-white hair sat like a wreath on an otherwise perfectly bald head, glistening like a polished shell. Having been on the Washington run for years, he knew its every stick, stone, and tree, every sheep, and every man coming and going ; and possessing a vigorous memory—which a few feared, for it so happened that he remembered too often what they would have preferred forgotten—he was ready to give a synopsis of the history of any one of his early acquaintance. He had the dates of births, deaths, and marriages at his crooked finger-ends, and nobody ever thought of doubting or contradicting him, for he was considered as



much an authority as any Government gazette, and most people liked to listen to reminiscences which dropped glibly from his tongue in long-spun yarns, oft repeated when called upon.

Though relieved from work, and given a home and rations in consideration of past labour faithfully fulfilled, there seemed many years of vitality left in the old shepherd yet; but his age was humoured and honoured, and there was always a comfortable rocking-chair set aside for him at the Gower hearth. And so he sat there now, looking first at one and then at another of the occupants of the room, where lamps, supported by wall-brackets and capped with delicate pink shades, were set around to diffuse a pale rosy light over the floor, uncarpeted, but strewn with rich soft mats of opossum fur—on an ‘old man’ kangaroo, long departed this life, but stuffed and preserved by the able hands of Jacob himself, a wedding present to the Gowers, and standing upright in a corner—on the stretched wings of a huge hawk—on a brace of aboriginal war implements grouped on the walls—upon fifty other things, including a piano, collected by degrees, and scattered to adorn the cosiest room of rooms to be found in the back country of Knutsford—on the faces,



young and old, there assembled—and on his own wrinkled visage, with its thin lips drawn in to rest on toothless gums.

Until this night he had not met Roland, and when somebody addressed the latter as Mr. Goldwin, he pricked up his ears and turned in his rocking-chair to look well at the lad who bore that name.

‘Jerry’s boy, is it?’ he mumbled. ‘Well, well, well; and not a bit like—not a bit—’ Then aloud to Roland: ‘I’m pleased to see you, sir—proud to see you. I knowed your father for a good friend.’

Roland, who had been conversing with a squatter, wheeled round sharply, coloured, turned pale, and said something conventional to meet this abrupt advance made in all friendliness. But having done this, he turned to renew the subject begun with the squatter, and touching on Knutsford politics, while the old shepherd’s yellow eyeballs were constantly shifting in his direction, and his fingers drummed on the arms of his chair as if he were impatient over something, as indeed he was, for the name of Goldwin had stirred his memory, and his tongue was itching to talk to Goldwin’s son. There was a hum of voices about him, but biding his time with that tattoo on his chair, he

took advantage of the first pause to open his mouth again and draw the young man's attention to himself.

'How do you like the country, sir? Does it go down with you like it done with the good old man?'

Then it seemed that conversation ceased, and each pair of ears awaited Roland's reply, which, when it was given, elicited dissatisfaction.

'It is a great deal better than I expected to find it; but, of course, it is backward yet.'

'Back'ard!' ejaculated Jacob.

'Backward!' echoed Gower and Gratrak.

'Backward!' chimed in quite a chorus of voices filled with protest.

'Why, mon alive, what is it you want?' asked Gower; 'we're going ahead as fast as we can.'

'Back'ard!' repeated Jacob, with his lips tightened and his head nodding with disapproval. 'If you'd been born when I was, you wouldn't be callin' things by upside down names,' he grunted. 'If you'd set foot in this 'ere country when I did you'd say we was mighty for'ard.'

'You have seen us going ahead, haven't you, Jacob,' put in one of the ladies, 'and have seen changes from better to better?'

'Changes,' answered the old man, with a

glance round at everybody, as if to ask who should question his experience, and with a lingering look at Roland, in whom he was feeling disappointed, rumour having declared him to be 'a smart young fellow.' 'Changes!' he went on. 'Ay, it's for an old un like me to say what's back'ard and what's for'ard.'

'Don't misunderstand me,' spoke up Roland, who felt as if he had trodden unwittingly on a hornets' nest. '"Backward" applies to all the world over, and not only to back country stations and budding colonies. We are advancing every day; we all know that; and yet there is so much to be done, so much more to be learned, so much room for improvement in all things as regards the common weal of mankind, that necessarily we still remain backward. I meant no disparagement whatever, especially to this district in its present social and industrial standing, which is to be so highly commended.'

This was propitiatory, though Jacob shook his head, as if unable to follow the new idea presented, while Gower aside gave out his 'H'm, h'm.'

'I wonder what John Lemur would say if he could git up now and see it,' said the old man, half in soliloquy.

‘Come, Jacob,’ requested Mrs. Gower, ‘tell us all about John Lemur. Mr. Goldwin has never heard, perhaps.’

‘Who is John Lemur?’ asked Roland, to whom the name was not familiar.

‘A chap that lived seventeen years with the blacks,’ volunteered one of the Jackeroo lads, who knew the whole story, and gave his information in a whisper.

‘Egg him on, Rol, for a yarn. You’ve only got to ask to receive. He’ll grind out half a dozen, if you like.’

Accordingly Roland added his request to Mrs. Gower’s, and Jacob, eyeing him now with fresh favour, smacked his lips as if something appetizing had been set before him, leaned heavily upon the arms of his chair, bent forward, and with ready will prepared to mount his hobby.

He prefaced his story with a question addressed to his host :

‘And how long ago is it since I met him?’

‘Oh, thirty or forty years, perhaps.’

‘Ay, that’s so. Somethin’ like thirty or forty year.’ Here Jacob glanced round again to note how that fact was acknowledged, and went on : ‘I knowed him well, John Lemur ; he told me all about hisself, and when a old un like me thinks of how *he* found this

'ere country, and how we sees it now, why, I'm puzzled over your "back'ard." Well, it's this way. I was a-doin' fencin' on the Boongarie run when I first see him, and he skeered me and another man. He was naked as a shorn sheep, and wild-eyed, with skin that wasn't yaller as a Chinaman's, nor black as the blacks', nor white as ourn, but just a first coat like of all three got into one. Wasn't that a sight to skeer a chap?' He gave another look around at his audience, and somebody said :

'Yes, it was ; go on.'

'Yes, it was,' continued the narrator ; 'and the other man shouted out quick to Tom, his mate, "Hallo, there ! fetch us a gun ; here's a queer bird for ye." But it wasn't no bird ; it spoke, it did, and called out, "What cheer, shipmate?" and that's what the sailor fellers say to one another for a polite "How do ye do?" I was a sailor once, and know that much, and it kind o' soothed me. Then Tom came with a run, shouldering his gun ; but he never levelled it, for the poor creature cried out, "I'm a shipwrecked sailor !" and we went up to him and brought him to the hut, and——'

'Hold on, Jacob,' interrupted Gratrak ; 'don't leave out a good part. Don't you

remember when the poor fellow saw the gun he called out in terror, "Would you shoot a British object?" He meant "subject," but had nigh forgotten his mother tongue.'

'So he did ; that's true,' said the old man, in no way put out because his memory had been thus nudged. 'And how many men would remember that much after being seventeen years with the blacks, eh?'

'Seventeen years!' repeated one or two who, like Roland, were now to hear for the first time the tale of John Lemur, the white man who was shipwrecked and isolated from his brethren for that lengthy period. 'Seventeen years!'

'Ay, seventeen years! and this way it was, for didn't he tell it me hisself often? In '46 it was, you see, and his vessel was bound for China from Phillipia; the *Buffalo* she was called, and he was one of the crew, and altogether twenty-two souls was on board of the *Buffalo*. There was the captain and his wife, and another poor woman with children, and as big and dirty a squall as ever wrecked a honest-built ship broke over 'em, gave 'em bare poles, and sent 'em bang on to a reef, with the women, poor creatures! a-screamin', the babies jinin' in, and the fellers workin' the skin off their bones to help. But the thing played

up high jinks with the *Buffalo* and her boats, too ; one was stove in, and the other they tried to rig up sea-tight to get 'em off the wreck, you see, when a big sea came and gulped it down like, draggin' the second mate to Davy Jones's locker. Well, they all set to work next to put a raft together out of the old riggin' and that, and on this twenty-one of 'em was huddled, cold, sick, and tremblin', and off they went, with a cask of water and some tinned soup, that's all ! not a bite else to serve their stomachs for the Lord knows how long.'

'Poor things !' said a pity-filled voice ; it belonged to the governess. 'And they all died ?'

'I'm a-comin' to that, ma'am,' said Jacob, nodding his head mournfully towards the lady. 'Well, yes, they all died but John, and didn't I shiver when he told me they all swore to die of hunger rather than gobble up each other ! They swore, they did, and kept the oath, too, glory be to 'em ! and they fretted and sickened, and tried to call a passin' brig, that just went on, never sighting the raft, and left 'em sicker and wretcheder, and a-longin' for death then. And they were tossed and blown about on that 'ere raft for I disremember now how many days, and the thing was washed ashore

at last, with seven alive out of the twenty-two. One poor chap thought he'd sprung a mine 'cause he came across an old canoe left there by blacks, and he got into the rotten old tub with a bit of hope warmin' at his heart, and went away a-sayin' "Cheer up, all of you! I'm off for fresh food and relief somewheres; who knows?" And the women waved their hands and hugged the babies, thinkin' he'd come back with food; but, lor! he never come back, and the blacks found his body a goodish while after washed ashore; and John turned his head away and drew his shirt-sleeve across his eyes, he did, when he spoke of that chap and his canoe; he said he felt more about him than the rest, 'cause he was so plucky to the last. So, you see, they got down to six now, and they went prying about and found a cave, where they lived for fourteen days, on never a thing but shellfish, until a crowd of blacks came.'

'Oh!' called out the governess again, anticipating the worst with a shudder and a screwing up of her features, 'and speared them. How dreadful!'

'No, they didn't,' continued the old man. 'The blacks ain't half so bad as the whites make 'em. They ain't got no sense, and



doesn't quite know what's good for themselves, that's all. They just came and stared, as you would, miss, at a Robinson Crusoe dropped from the clouds before you. They jabbered at 'em and felt 'em, and got to understand they was half dead, and showed 'em how to get food, and brought it to 'em, too; but John said it was a hard time, and the ladies, delicate reared, livin' in a 'old humpy, and no proper clothes to keep 'em warm, and nothing but hardship, jist picked at the roasted fish, or baked opossum, or bush-rat——'

'Rats! oh, not rats!' interrupted Roland, with a grimace and look of incredulity.

'Ay, rats, my lad, rats!' Jacob answered emphatically. 'The blacks think 'em a treat, and if you was to see one a-grillin', and not know, you'd think it was a chicken, with the white flesh they has.'

'Oh, weel, they're only a distant sort o' cousin to a rabbit, maybe,' remarked Gower, 'and not so bad. Go on, Jacob. The ladies picked at the tit-bits.'

'That they did; but it wasn't the food; it was lots of other things that tried 'em and killed 'em in the end. They all died—died game—died glad, I dessay, till only John was left to camp and eat and drink with the blacks

for seventeen years. Sometimes they got cranky, stupid things! when he wanted to learn 'em how to live more comfortable, and wouldn't bide by his talk or camp in the gunyahs he built; but they never thought of *eatin'* him; the gins made a big pet of him, and often saved his life when their banjamens—that's sweet-hearts—got jealous. Well, John pulled through his seventeen year, any way; but every day he'd say to himself, "What cheer, shipmate?" 'cause he found his language goin' out of his head, you see, and was afeard when he did see a white feller again he wouldn't understand him. Says he, "I used to hang on to shreds of English for fear they'd never take me for a white man, and I said every night and every mornin', 'What cheer, shipmate?' and never forgot it; it got to be like a prayer." Poor old John! Here Jacob shook his head again sadly, and paused to draw a deep breath.

'And how did he find the run at last?—Boongarie, I think you said?' asked Roland, who had been an eager listener.

'That come about with kangaroo-huntin',' said Jacob. 'All of 'em together at it—John and the blacks. And they came on a fence, and see a hut with smoke comin' from it. They knowed it was a white man's hut, and so

John set to and climbed the fence and skeered us, and we fetched him in. But the blacks didn't like his goin' away, and the gins howled and cut at their bodies with sharp stones, like they do when one of 'em dies, and they hung about him and tried to keep him, jest like any white woman over a brother or 'usband. One old gin thought he was her son from the first, dead and come alive agen, for they has a notion that when they die they'll get up white. So John had hard work to get quit o' the lot, but he did. And him and me got to be great chums ; and we see the country when it was mighty back'ard, Mr. Goldwin.'

The old man looked towards Roland with an expression of defiance and triumph as he laid stress on the word 'backward,' as if his foot were set on it.

'Where is he?' asked the governess. 'Alive?'

'Dead years gone,' said Jacob, shutting up his mouth till it hollowed against his gums and made a valley between nose and chin bordered by bleached shaggy bush.

'He didn't live very long after his restoration to his people,' remarked Will Gratrak.

'No ; the hard knocks did for him,' put in Alec. 'But he had time to get married.'

‘And never see his boy,’ mumbled the old man.

‘Oh, he had a son?’ said Roland.

‘Yes; he’s living now,’ came the answer to this from Gratrak. ‘And if you want a proof of the country’s progress, ask the value of its land, though I presume you are bound to know that much. When John Lemur was rescued he was overflowing with gratitude, I believe—I didn’t know him personally—and as it was near Etoco that relief came to him—that was old Robsville, you know—he called it his country, and at the first Government land sale he bought a quarter of an acre of ground for just the upset price, and not a man would bid against him because he wanted to hold some earth in *his* country. He got it for a trifle, and, of course, it belongs to his son now, and if it’s worth a farthing it’s worth £16,000 this day. There, Mr. Goldwin, that’s the true story of the man who herded with aborigines for something like the sixth of a century.’

‘And if he was alive to-day,’ said Jacob, still anxious to speak, ‘he might ha’ had a big say in Separation, and had a seat in the new Parliament.’

‘He’s better off where he is, then,’ laughed

Gower. 'Parliament's a whirligig, and he earned his rest.'

'Perhaps,' said Mrs. Gower, 'he will intercede for the poor blacks, who, taking them for what they are, did not behave so badly, after all.'

'Well, perhaps their women kept them in order, since they were attached to John,' said one of the company.

'Or perhaps John was too lean or too tough,' said another.

'I don't think that tribe indulged in cannibalism,' observed Gower. 'The poor deevils, they're not so bad; and the whites have often worried them into viciousness.'

'That's true,' answered Gratrak. 'And, besides, they look upon the white man as an interloper, as we do the Chinamen, only our means of redress is poll-tax and theirs a soul-tax. When they can spear a soul out of their country and the world they don't hesitate about it, if it belongs to a white man and they think him dangerous to their future peace.'

'And this poor fellow—Lemur,' inquired Roland, 'did he not suffer otherwise from their savage associations?'

'Suffer! Of course he did,' answered Gratrak again. 'His subsequent action proves that he

must have been conscious of a certain barbarism in himself, for he got baptized again and took to religion.'

'But he couldn't shake off some of their habits, eh, Jacob? He used to amuse himself with two sticks, beating them together as an accompaniment to just the same sing-song tunes as you may have heard from the blacks about here. Jacob says so.'

This from the hostess.

'Ay,' answered Jacob, who grasped at the first chance of getting in a word—'ay, he'd keep up that blacks' moosic for a' hour, he would; and he could fling a boomerang with King Billy himself.'

'I wonder if he ever acquired a taste for grilled rat?' asked a Jackeroo laughingly. 'Did he, Jacob?'

'I disremember,' came the reply, 'though, I tell ye, rats ain't bad. Now, what would you say to a brek'ast of alligators' eggs?'

'No, thank you, decidedly,' said the last questioner, with a wry face that set the company laughing.

'Well, young sir, I've had 'em for mine,' Jacob avowed, with a thin smile on his lips at the reminiscence. 'And if the boss hadn't let it out, I'd been none the wiser, there! A lot

of us was camped out, and hungry enough to swallow nails, when the boss comes up to us with his hat full of eggs. "Now then," says he, "my boys, here's a find of wild turkey eggs! We'll go in for 'em." Well, we cooked 'em for turkey eggs, we did that, and not a man-jack but swore they was the daintiest thing they'd ever tasted. But the boss said—good-natured like, we thought—he'd not jine in, to leave us all the more; and after break'ast he laughed till his sides ached, and says, says he, "The turkey that laid them eggs is called a alligator up this way; but they're every bit as good." Well, now, up to that time we was jest as happy as rabbits in a cabbage-patch, and got to cracking jokes all round; but when the boss rammed that joke down our throats that way, he might as well poured a billy of what-do-ye-call-'em — ipe — ipekakana; that's it!—down after the eggs. We all got pretty quiet, and thought of our first trip on the sea, and—well, we soon got rid of our break'ast. But, lor bless you! it's all imagination, and them eggs is as good as any other for starving men.'

'Oh come, Jacob!' laughed Mrs. Gower, 'you are giving us an emetic all round, I'm afraid.'

'Weel,' suggested her husband, 'let us ring

a change. Coom, strike the light guitar, Bess.'

This was an invitation for Mrs. Gower to open the piano and call upon somebody to sing, so that yarn-spinning closed for a time, and Jacob—who, when he was not talking or feeding, or in any way actively interested, slept—let his chin fall forward on his breast till his shining crown was particularly assertive, and gave a decided snore to lead off stray followers during the musical portion of the programme, and was only awakened when supper was announced and handed around.

A night such as this spent in a society so fresh, so charming in its novelty and ingenuousness, offered to Roland a draught temporarily Lethean to drug the imps, which were soon, however, to be quickened to a still more painful liveliness than ever.



## CHAPTER VI.

### HUSBAND AND WIFE.

‘WHAT does he want us to do?’ It was Jack Lockstud who put this question to his mother the night of the day that brought Roland’s letter to her. ‘What does he want us to do? Rol is a philosopher. I dare say he is right; but it is deuced hard for people who are not born philosophers to do what’s right under all circumstances. Are we to go up to father, and say: “We’ve no right to be angry with you all this time, because we know you now to be a downright villain, and to have done the most cruel thing man could do—to have robbed——”’

‘My dear,’ pleaded Mrs. Lockstud, ‘don’t run on like that. Rol doesn’t mean that; he knows all the villainy, but he means our silence and sullenness will make bad worse. You have read his letter, and you, like me, should

be ruled by it. It never occurred to me to think your unhappy father would be driven to further mischief, but it appears it is so. Rol would not write that he had heard rumours of his gambling if he thought it idle rumour. Gambling! Jack, fancy that; and me to stand by and let him go on to destruction! No, no; we must try to draw him back, even if he has been—— Oh, Jack! Jack!—— Suddenly smitten with woeful recollection, she began to cry, or rather continued the crying, which had begun with the perusal of the letter in the morning, and had only been suppressed at intervals. ‘To think,’ she sobbed quietly, ‘that I must talk so of him; that I can no longer hide his faults, as I have ever striven to do.’

Jack’s face whitened like his mother’s, and all his boyish heart swelled enough to defy speech for some few seconds, and fill his eyes with hot tears. He got up from his chair, and turned his back upon the weeping wife and mother. Presently he made an attempt to speak, but with a suspicious tremble.

‘You have done your duty to him and to us; you need not reproach yourself.’

A family sorrow that stirs all the hidden depths of our nature brings to the surface

whatever sentimentality lies crusted there--the something strong that an erring, stubborn fancy thinks weak. So Jack, hitherto shy of demonstration in his effort to be manly, suddenly turned, and, going up to Mrs. Lockstud, put his arms about her much as Middie might have done, and, urging her to be comforted, promised to do whatever she and Roland wished.

They were alone, and with closed doors had been discussing Roland's letter; and now Mrs. Lockstud decided that she would make an overture of peace that very night to her husband--that she would sit up for him even if he did not come home till the small hours of the next morning, which was not an unusual thing for him to do--and she meant to speak to him as she had not done since Roland, who had promised to relieve his father of the cruel task, had exposed the crime of which he and she and Jessie had been, and were, the miserable victims.

The determination to do this, after the rupture and following aversion and silence maintained, needed all her courage, and an awakening of whatever slumbering love there might be in her bosom for the man she once had worshipped--who was the father of her

children. But somehow Priscilla Lockstud, simple and docile as she was, found it easier to follow the wishes of Roland than be guided by her aunt, Mrs. Calliport, who believed, like Brutus, in enforcing retribution even on her own flesh and blood—in justice at all costs.

Priscilla's letter to Roland caught the complexion of her aunt's stoical resolution to do what she thought was right, but not the spirit of it. Ever ready to give way to the guidance of others, she obeyed and stilled a sensitive conscience which helped to increase her bitterness, and forced her to write to him of a breaking heart, hardened to unforgiveness. She was compelled to sit up very late, in order to carry out her purpose, but not till the morning; for her husband, letting himself in with a latch-key, returned to his wretched home just before midnight and walked straight to a distant room which he had had fitted up for his own use, and grimly called his 'quarantine ground,' in its total separation from the rest of the household.

He resented his wife's attitude as an impertinence in consideration of her former servility. After all, he reasoned, he had been dragged into wrong-doing, which, but for her encouragement of a boy and girl attachment,

founded on nature's law—the bond of fraternity—would never have come to light.

The prospect of future affluence for his first-born had been no poor factor in his allegiance to the plotter, and why should he be altogether blamed because he had done as many more tried, when opportunity offered, to scheme in the interests of his offspring? The failure was galling, and the disclosure only an overcoming pain, as it affected his standing in the goodwill of the son to whom all his fatherhood yearned, and by whom he had been ruled to a quiet submission to the inevitable restitution. The nobility of the boy he had allowed to be reared in falsity, who, uncontaminated, had escaped from the unholy fire as safely as the bold youths of Scriptural fame, defying the malignant authority of the heathen monarch, and walking through flame unscorched for their hatred of his false gods, had, by its subtle influence for good, conjured up to a strange susceptibility a conscience somewhat lethargic for want of wholesome exercise; but Roland's absence, and his family's contempt, served to numb it again, and to completely sour a nature ever threatening to acidify. Conscious of this, he sought the oblivion which comes with baneful drink, and

the gaming-table attraction ; so that, having fallen already, he went on falling, the victim of a gravitation of its kind drawing him down to evil centres, but for the interposition which was to come.

He was anxious to isolate himself from wife and children ; but for financial difficulties he would have gone abroad, or away somewhere, as Roland had done. As it was, he tried to content himself with setting apart a room especially for his own use when at Cecil-lambda, by absenting himself from home as much as he possibly could without exciting comment, and by plunging into dissipation.

Accustomed as he had been to his wife's devotion under all or any circumstances, her shrinking and evident loathing now were not accepted with anything like resignation to the behaviour he merited, but rather aggravated a surly rebellion against what he chose to think an insolent intolerance.

On this night in particular he entered his self-appointed garrison, where a troop of evil humours gathered about him, and shut to the door without locking, for he expected no intruder. He lit the gas, and looked stealthily around the room ; next he crossed over to an *escritoire*, unlocked it, drew from his breast-

pockets a couple of small bags, but heavily weighted, deposited them in one of its recesses, and then noiselessly, as if afraid of being overheard, he turned the key in the lock again, tried it, and, lastly, drew it out and slipped it into his pocket.

This much done, he drew a chair opposite the fireplace, where on summer nights plush decoration took the place of glowing coals, and stared at the purple drapery as if he saw written there an outline of his past, present and future life, for him to read and brood over.

Lost in moody reflection, he did not hear the door softly open, nor see a little woman bravely pass through into the 'quarantine' chamber—a little woman dressed in white, with white face, white lips, and even whitened hair.

Velvet-slippered, she shot swiftly over the carpet, and stood behind him, pronouncing his name in a fear-stricken tone.

'Theo!'

He started, began to tremble with some hidden passion, but he did not turn to meet her or alter his position.

'You *here*?' he said with a cynical emphasis.

‘Yes, Theo, where I have a right to be.’

‘In the leper’s cave,’ he said with his own sneer.

Unheeding this remark, she spoke again :

‘Are you not glad to see me here?’

He was glad ; it pleased him to see that his power over her was not all gone ; but he only answered :

‘I think I have forgotten what it is to be glad.’

‘I have not forgotten that you are my husband, the father of my children.’

At this he rose from his chair and faced her for the first time.

‘You have not?’ he said. The words were interrogative, but their tone, full of meaning, implied a denial to what she had just affirmed as a truth. ‘You have not?’

They made her quake more than ever, and begin to feel as if she were the guilty one to plead for pardon.

‘No! no!’ she cried out like one in pain. ‘I have never, never forgotten it one moment! You could scarcely expect me not to feel bitter, not to feel hard, learning what there was to learn.’ Here she shuddered perceptibly. ‘If I have been wrong to shrink from you as I have, it is the memory of the little dead face



that nigh broke my heart—my young heart!—the memory of the little coffin, where I strewed flowers—the memory of the grave where I believed part of myself was lying! It is the sight of our poor girl's sorrow and wretchedness! If I am right in trying to forget and forgive, it is because the child I thought an angel in heaven is restored to me in my old age, an angel on earth—because, dear as all my children are to me, he, my first-born, must be the dearest, the best beloved of all! And if I have been wrong'—she went up closer to him, and lifted her hands till they rested on his shoulders, while his arms hung stiffly unresponsive at his sides, and his features twitched at her allusion to Roland—'if I have wronged you, or been wrong in my hardness, oh, forgive me! Love me as you loved me long ago, and we may yet remember how to be glad together, and, come what may, I shall still be your loyal wife. After all these years of misunderstanding, let us understand each other now; let the memory of that boy's wrongs and his sweetness and goodness this day lead us to peace and farther from the sin that has gone before, and unite us in the love that has never yet been complete. Oh, Theo! Theo!

Her hands involuntarily relaxed their hold

on him as she staggered, and would have fallen but for his right arm, that quickly lost its rigidity and wound about her. In alluding to Roland thus, she had found a passport to all the heart that was her husband's. She had struck the keynote to the holiest trait in his nature.

His bloodless face, with its drawn lines, drooped near to hers, and his cold lips shaped to imprint a kiss on her forehead. The garri-son was taken. Conscience awoke again from its lethargy, fitfully stirred, and contrition and shame sat on his countenance, the reading of which, with the impulsive kiss, created in her a fresh well-spring of love, to send the warm blood as a blush from brow to chin, and make her fling her arms around his neck with an ecstatic tragic delight, as she exclaimed :

‘ My darling ! I could die now—happy !’

That he was impelled to a manifestation so unusual surprised himself ; but an indefinable sense, creeping slowly about his heart, deprived him of all control over action in that supreme moment. Was it gratitude, or sluggish affection stimulated to warmth, when he reflected that perhaps it was from her that Roland inherited much of his nobility ?

Her simple eloquence, her appeal for his for-

giveness—HIS !—were probably as coals of fire to purge the crust from his heart and the film from his mental sight, that had been too weak to search at his soul and compel him to frankly acknowledge its vices, so that the one began to throb with sympathy, and the other, passing, revealed to him the enormity of his crime. Yet his especial individuality still stood firm—obstinately firm—and he would not, could not, bow his head before her and confess his iniquity or his tardy remorse. It was so hard to fall from king to subject—to bend to one over whom he had towered. The lips that can avow, ‘I have sinned,’ are but the agents of a lofty mind, and this Lockstud did not possess.

But that kiss of peace was in itself a confession, a volume in a mere sound, a mere touch, and, it being given, a vague sense of comfort crept to his bosom, because there remained one creature yet in the world ready to cling to him through shadow as well as sunshine. He was appeased and gratified.

Mrs. Calliport and Jessie were not surprised by a visit from Mrs. Lockstud the next morning, for she came to see her daughter daily ; but what she had to communicate was surprising.

She found Jessie reclining on a couch—she was always reclining now—and looking painfully delicate. Her face seemed shrunken and waxy, her cheeks were hollowed, and dimples and childish gaiety were no more. Mrs. Calliport was sitting near her, with a periodical in her hand, from which she had been extracting anything that was lively and likely to call a smile to the girl's face.

When Priscilla entered, the paper—a comic magazine—was consigned to her lap, and her glasses were removed, and Jessie's reply to an anxious inquiry after her health was, what it always had been since her trouble, 'Tired, that's all.'

Mrs. Lockstud sighed, and Mrs. Calliport took from a table close at hand the homeopathic mixture with which she was trying to give the beloved invalid 'tone,' as she said, and which was swallowed obediently by the patient from a tablespoon at intervals.

'She won't be tired when we can breathe the Wondoo air—will you, dear?'

'No, auntie. I'm sure I shall get better there,' replied Jessie, who, while she thought she must feel better out of Phillipia, knew she never would be well.

'I hope so, Jess,' said Mrs. Lockstud. 'I

shall be happy again, knowing that ; and '—here she abruptly, and with a little gulp, made her unexpected announcement—' now that your poor father and I are reconciled, the world doesn't look so dark as it did to me.'

'What!' snapped the old lady, 'do you mean to tell me that you have actually taken him by the hand so soon? Ought you? Can you?'

'I have been unwise to defer it, aunt,' said Priscilla quietly.

'I must confess I don't understand you,' said Mrs. Calliport with an offended tone. 'You have mitigated a sentence demanded by justice. Where is the punishment if you stand by him, condone his offence, give him the peace he should never know for months to come? We can't give him over to the legal severity which he would most certainly receive, but we can let him suffer for a time the frowning, the spurning, of the whole family!'

Mrs. Calliport nervously crumpled the magazine in her lap as she spoke—an alliance opposed, for the paper was comedy, and tragedy impelled the working of her fingers.

Jessie heaved a heavy breath, and a tear trickled down her cheek. 'There was indeed 'a whirlwind in the sigh,' 'an ocean in the

tear.' She looked from her aunt to her mother and back again. Who was right? she wondered, wishing somebody would tell her, for she could not reason it out herself. Her wish was soon realized, for Mrs. Lockstud drew Roland's letter from her pocket, and handed it to her aunt, saying :

'Read that, aunt, please. I received it yesterday, and up to then I was ready to abide by your advice and reasoning.'

'Read it aloud, please, auntie,' begged Jessie wistfully, for she had recognised the writing.

'From Rol!' said Mrs. Calliport, opening the letter and referring at once to the signature, but hesitating about obeying Jessie for fear of distressing her.

'Read it aloud,' said Priscilla, understanding the hesitation ; 'there is nothing in it but what is good for us all to hear.'

Had it been from anybody else but Roland, Mrs. Calliport would have said, 'I'll read it to please you, but don't expect me to be guided by it.' But as he was as much a demigod in her sight as his father was an arch-fiend, she handled the letter more reverently than otherwise, prepared to abide by its text, so truly was he deified by her.

So Aunt Jessie reset her pince-nez, cleared

her throat, and read from beginning to end, with the words trembling as they fell from twitching lips, and the leaves rustling in her shaking hands.

The first part was descriptive of his present mode of life ; it was the conclusion with which Mrs. Lockstud was principally concerned, and upon that alone it is necessary to dwell.

‘He has been clawed by the devil in female shape,’ read out Mrs. Calliport, and we can guess to whom the ‘he’ referred. ‘Let guardian angels undo her foul work—heal him now, and interpose their wings to bear him aloft. Remember, “oppression may drive a man mad”—may drive him to other devils, to obloquy and disgrace, and farther and farther from the heaven to which the contrite heart is precious. Shall his wife and children do this, and yet hold their heads erect as creatures walking righteously before God? or shall they be steeped in sin likewise for the abuse of a power which is surely theirs? Shall they sink or uphold a guilty soul? If you find it hard to forgive and forget, I cannot blame you ; but we can at least be true to the angel that moves us to compassion and forbearance, and may win him back to repentance.’

Aunt Jessie folded the letter up silently, and

tears gathered behind her glasses as she returned it to Priscilla. She felt rebuked.

It was Jessie who brought her to herself.

She had risen, only to fall on her knees before her aunt, to lift her face up to hers, to catch at the shaking hands, and exclaim :

‘Oh, auntie! I forgive my father, and I know you forgive him, too, though you pretend you don’t—like mamma, when we were little, would tell us she did not love us, because we had been naughty, and she loved us and cried over us all the same. You do forgive him, don’t you? I have been dazed, have not been able to think, have listened to you and mamma, have been wicked, revengeful, hateful; but it is all gone now. I see my fault now. Rol always knows what is right, and how to make other people know, too. Let us win papa back to repentance, if we can, and make him a happier, better man.’

‘My dear,’ said the old lady huskily, ‘we have all been wrong but Rol.’

This admission was at once accepted as a truce, and Priscilla told her husband later on that Aunt Jessie was willing to let bygones be bygones.



## CHAPTER VII.

### THE KISS OF PEACE.

WHEN the awkwardness following the reconciliation between Priscilla and her husband wore off, Lockstud's natural reserve and chilliness still asserted their obstinate strength, and refused to budge; but all his haughty air of assumption vanished. His hair showed streaks of gray, his face furrows; he was no longer a handsome man, but dearer than ever now to the wife who had found so late a semblance of conjugal felicity, if no more.

Yet Theodore was an unhappy man, and all her tenderness could not drive the settled gloom from his brow, or bring him peace.

She thought he was over-burdened with remorse. He was not, for debt and contrition alike weighed upon him, and debt was the heavier of the two.

Two days scarcely elapsed after the midnight

meeting in the 'quarantine' chamber, when a note came to him from Mrs. Calliport—a note, or advance, expected since Priscilla had told him amicable relations were to be established again between him and all members of the family—stiff and formal enough, but accepted by him as conciliatory, and perhaps magnanimous. It certainly brought him some hope and solace.

'DEAR THEO,' it ran,

'Jessie and I are going up country, and as she wishes to say good-bye to you, you had better come and see her, to spare her any extra exertion, for which she is totally unfit.

'Come to-night.

'Your affectionate aunt,

'JESSIE CALLIPORT.'

He went the same night.

When he entered Mrs. Calliport's house, it was with a whirligig of thought pounding at his brain, and some new-born emotion in his breast. Probably he was more embarrassed than the prodigal son. He had no expectation of the fatted calf or any warm welcome awaiting him; but, accustomed to hide passing tremors of sentiment or qualms of fear, he

spoke with his usual loftiness to the ancient maiden who attended the door, asking a superfluous question :

‘Your mistress at home?’

‘Yes, sir,’ said the woman, an old and privileged retainer, wondering why her mistress’s nephew had kept away from the house so long. ‘My missus expects you. She and Miss Lockstud are in the big bedroom, sir. She told me to tell you to go there ; Miss Jessie isn’t very well. Have you not been well, sir?’

‘Quite well, thank you,’ he answered, with more impatience than courtesy, as he passed her almost with a brush of his shoulder to mount the staircase.

‘Then your health is an improvement on your manners,’ muttered the woman, ‘and both want doctoring, I’m thinking. I wonder what sort of a dose is good for high and mighty folk,’ she added, as she looked after him, and he strode the hall to ascend the stairs and disappear from her sight.

Then he stood on the second floor, and, reaching the room as directed, he rapped at the door with his knuckles, and Aunt Jessie’s voice gave the ‘open sesame’ from within ; so he appeared again before her.

The first thing he saw immediately opposite

was his daughter. He had not seen her for some few weeks, and therefore was the terrible change in her more marked for him. Unlike Jephthah's daughter, not for glory was she sacrificed, but for his sin.

The two women—the old and the young Jessie—with their faces turned to meet him, started as he stood in the doorway. His furrowed features and gray-streaked hair smote them with pity and pain.

He had been aging some time, but looked quite old now. Yet it was not the rather premature decline of his one-time elegance alone that struck them; it was the unfamiliar expression on the familiar countenance, distorting it with agitation and palpable distress.

In that moment he only saw his daughter, with her pallid, attenuated face turned compassionately upon his own, and it chilled his blood and sank his egotism. Never capable of strong and deep affection, he nevertheless had known a natural fondness for his children, which the hardness of his nature reined in with an ugly curb, and his manner ever contradicted; and no bitter human vengeance, no tirade of invective and scorn, could possibly have affected him as much as seeing her thus, a silent reflection of the result of his crime staring at him there, the

ghostly spirit of his guilt mocking him in the physical wreck of what was once, and would be now, but for him, the embodiment of laughing, happy girlhood. It was his retribution.

Then, and only then, the invulnerability of the man gave way. He forgot Theodore Lockstud—which was phenomenal—forgot the presence of his aunt—for whom he had prepared a dutiful and propitiatory speech—and walked quickly towards the girl, who, half in fear of him, and wholly commiserating, had risen to welcome him with filial respect, and took her in his arms all in silence, laid her head upon his breast, where she could hear the beating of his heart with its rapid hammer strokes, where she shed outright tears of pardon and tenderness.

There was no need for words, no need for either to make allusion to the breach or the cause of it.

Who better than he could understand now how the mishap of her strong, pure love had tortured her to sickness? That she would meet her trouble with tears and some heart-burning, he believed, but quite expected that she would rally again, and in time marry and be happy. For this depth of feeling in her

he was not prepared, and only understood her character at this hour of misery when forced to realize the mischief he had worked.

‘I have cursed her,’ he thought, ‘and I am cursed.’

With an effort at calmness he spoke at last, still holding her closely in his arms, with his hot lips on her brow.

‘You are going away. This is my good-bye to you. You—you must try and get well and strong, for—for my sake as well as your own.’

No word of atonement in this; but Jessie, like her mother, could interpret his kiss, his embrace, his new and strange—sweetly strange—sympathy, the lamentation in action, and mute but eloquent confession of his misery and shame.

She could only cry and cling to him, and suffer for his distress even more than for her own.

‘Don’t do that—don’t cry, child!’ he pleaded, wilfully misconstruing her tears. ‘You will get well again and be happy; don’t distress yourself.’

He knew she was weeping for him, but this he would not admit, afraid of touching on ground that might give way beneath him. He drew her frail form back to the couch till it lay

there in repose again, and he shook up the pillows to fix them at her head and shoulders, saying :

‘Lie down now and rest ; weeping will not give you strength.’

‘Thank you, papa,’ she murmured, with closed eyes as if from exhaustion, yet with a smile of content that might have been a baby’s in sleep.

Seeing this, he turned then to speak to Mrs. Calliport, but found she was no longer there.

He remembered that she had bade him enter, and he had done so forgetting her presence.

‘Was she indignant ?’ he thought, but was too much engrossed with Jessie to care just then.

The truth was that, seeing her nephew overcome by this meeting and reunion with his daughter, she could not stand by unmoved. Moreover, there was a sanctity in it not meant for her intrusive gaze, so she fled to a little room adjoining, which was appropriated by Jessie generally, and there sat herself down to bury her face in her handkerchief and cry as heartily as Jessie had on her father’s bosom.

There Theo found her, having unceremoniously sought for her, as was his custom

of old, in every room until his search was thus rewarded; and there, without apology or confession, unmindful of his set speech, he opened the interview, anticipated with dread, with a question hoarsely spoken and of three words:

‘Is she dying?’

Mrs. Calliport, not aware of his proximity, started to hear his voice so close at her ear; but she did not look up, for she sobbed her reply in her handkerchief.

‘No! no! don’t say so—don’t think so! The country will set her up again—it must!’

‘She needs a doctor, and must have one at once.’

Lockstud said this in his own old peremptory way.

‘No doctor can prescribe for her.’ Aunt Jessie raised her head and spoke as emphatically as her nephew. ‘She needs change of air, change of scene; and she, poor child! hates Phillipia. A doctor will worry her into fresh sickness with questions that neither she nor I can answer. You trust her to me.’

Lockstud folded his arms across his chest and, gnawing his moustache, abruptly turned on his heel and began to walk the room. Mrs. Calliport’s eyes followed him for a few seconds before she spoke again.



‘Come here, Theo, and sit down ; I want to speak to you. I can better speak here, away from that poor girl.’

But Theo stood still some few paces off, and said with bitterness :

‘What man shall sit before his accuser—his judge?’

‘I do not wish to accuse or judge,’ she answered with a stifled sob.

‘I am already convicted, then. That girl has sentenced me.’

‘Oh, come here, do ; don’t stand there so!’ entreated Mrs. Calliport.

He obediently walked up closer to her chair, and stood before her with bent head.

His worn, care-seamed face, his despondent attitude, his bitter repentance, representing to her a phase of his character totally unknown and unexpected, did more to soften her towards him than any set speech could have done ; and her maternal affection, so chilled by the blast of all belief in his future redemption, first gently fanned into warmth by Roland’s letter, only needed a strong breath such as this to enkindle it ; for the love-sparks were by no means dead, but smouldered beneath the ashes his irreparable crime had created—the ashes of withered hope.

‘I meant once,’ she said, with no rebuke in her accents, ‘to forget you had ever been as a son to me, to show you no more pity than you have shown to others ; but I did not ask you to come to-night for censure, but for peace. I am not going to touch on what has happened, or add to your distress. I have tried to do a mother’s duty to you, and must have failed somehow, else there could not have been so much wrong in your life. I have scolded you, have preached and besought, and with all have done no good. You have often laid your peccadilloes at my door, and perhaps you’ve been right to do so. But if we have both been in error, ’tis not too late to turn over a new leaf.’

‘It is too late to change destiny,’ he muttered, with his eyes on the carpet—‘too late.’

‘I don’t believe in a destiny independent of our own creation, that comes to us whether we will it or not ; destiny is just what we make it ; we can control it for good or for evil—lead up to a rose-garden or a pestilence. Your destiny has been in my hands, and I have not worked it properly, it seems. You see, I am willing now to take some of the blame on my own shoulders ; and because of my faulty guardianship we all suffer now—you most of all—yet your suffering shall be your ransom.’

‘I suffer more than if I were set to breaking stones,’ he answered gloomily. ‘There is death in that girl’s face, and so surely as she dies I am her murderer.’

His voice broke, and again he turned and walked away, his arms still folded, his head bowed, a transformed Theodore Lockstud.

‘She will not die,’ said Mrs. Calliport, with a sudden querulousness, as if impatient with him for hinting at the possibility. ‘She is young, and money shall not be spared to buy back her health, her roses and dimples and smiles.’

‘You are very good to us all,’ he replied, still tramping. He had often made this remark before, but never with the present sincerity that gave the words the true ring.

‘I have tried to be, tried to be,’ said the old lady, with a shake of her head implying dissatisfaction with the trial. ‘But sit down, Theo; there is one thing more I wish to say to you, but your walking irritates me; old women are so easily irritated.’

He drew a chair near her, and at last sat down, ready to listen, and with his long white fingers pulling and twisting at his moustache; his nerves were too unstrung for perfect quiescence of muscles and limbs.

‘I just said,’ she went on, ‘that I am an old

woman ; well, that's a fact, you know ; and that old women have sometimes nervous fancies is another fact. One of mine is that my time has nearly run out. I am going away for our dear Jessie's sake ; the effort to leave my shell may do me good or may do me harm. I don't know. Anyway, "Who knows what a day may bring forth ?" Therefore it is just as well for me to tell you something to-night, for it is an excellent opportunity. If it should be ordained that we may not speak together again like this, I wish you to open that davenport of mine in the next room. You will find in a drawer there a little book, a history in your own mother's writing, my dear sister's ! It concerns you only, and for that reason I wish no other eye but yours to see it, no other hand to touch it. It has nothing whatever to do with money matters.'

Lockstud looked at her curiously and waited to hear more, but she ceased for a moment, while in the act of drawing from her pocket a bunch of keys, from which she selected one in particular, to be slipped from the steel ring. This being done, she handed it to her nephew, saying :

'Keep it carefully, and if I don't return you'll know what to do with it.'

‘But,’ he asked, ‘what is the history? and in what way does it concern me?’

She put out her hand and laid it on his.

‘My dear, you will know all when you read the little book. There are strange coincidences in life, and you will be struck with one shown in this simple little diary. It is a secret now, but to be made known to you after my death.’

‘A secret?’ Theo thought the one secret of his life had been burdensome enough, and he did not feel the least anxious to have another thrust upon him. But he took the little key and consigned it to his waistcoat pocket, with a shade of his old impatience darkening his face and knitting his brow.

‘Yes, a secret,’ went on his aunt. ‘But after what has happened to you and us, it seems to me the misery of her life was light in comparison. She left it to me to tell you at my own discretion, and now I think the time has come to tell you. That is all. I think we ought to go back to our poor girl.’

They rose together, and he offered her his arm; thus linked they returned to the bedroom, where they found Jessie sleeping calmly, with her soft and lengthy lashes resting on her cheeks and glistening yet with her tears, with her lips partly open, and her hands folded

as though she had passed into slumber with prayer.

‘Poor child! don’t wake her,’ whispered Mrs. Calliport, gazing lovingly on the sweet face.

Lockstud did not. His heart sank again, and his bosom heaved, as he stooped and kissed her lightly on the lips with a ‘good-night’ and ‘good-bye’ only mentally uttered.

‘We used to kiss —you and I,’ observed his aunt, when he held out his hand to her at parting.

‘When you had not found me out,’ he answered somewhat sullenly.

‘No, my dear; but I have found you out to-night, for the first time, to be made of better stuff than I thought. Now, sir, kiss me.’

He bent his head gravely and obeyed her with the first impulse of grateful affection he had ever felt for her, and so the rehabilitation was complete. He went home conquered, a better man, but one of the most miserable men in Phillippia that night. He was a modern Prometheus, with more than one vulture gnawing at his vitals. Debt had been stronger than remorse, but now remorse was more mighty than debt, and God help the man who falls a prey to both together.

But Mrs. Calliport was sensible of more content than she had known for weeks. Would she have been so could she have foreseen that what she wished to be a posthumous disclosure would not be posthumous at all?

## CHAPTER VIII.

THEODORE LOCKSTUD SAYS 'FAREWELL.'

YES, Lockstud was in debt. Had he not lost heavily by the collapse of the Nabob? And to recoup had he not dipped recklessly into speculations of divers kinds?

A mirage promising an Eldorado—a tree goodly to all appearance, with clusters of fruit—a river running golden sands: each and all allured him in turn, to drag him out of his depth into a sea of debt, wherein he floundered, catching at straws, but sinking deeper and deeper. The reports which had reached the Pennacoves concerning him were not without truth. As before stated, he had tried to sodden his mind and its wholesale burden of care with drink; but he was one of those who, so indulging, never quite sink the man or raise the brute, but that incarnation of recklessness and excitement which, being neither brute nor



human, must be a devil of its kind—a devil daring him to wield the cue, deal the cards, or back a horse, with equal dash and foolhardiness, quite anomalous to a character both shrewd and cautious. Unfortunately he began by winning. Success was the mirage—the Eldorado illusory, the tree bearing Dead Sea fruit, the river of golden sands proving a bog; for he played higher and higher, betted wilder, staked hundreds on Asahel, the supposed winning horse of the Clatterbang Cup, and lost—lost all, more than he had won. So his substance was dragged; so Cecillambda, and whatever property he possessed besides, became mortgaged; so the mortgage loan was absorbed; so his position as bank-manager was held by a mere thread; and so, lacking the moral courage to correct habits of expenditure, domestic and otherwise, he, goaded to madness, contemplated a dangerous loophole out of the wretched maze.

Things were at such a pass that night when Priscilla sought him and took the garrison. And that morning, when she, having read and re-read Roland's letter, was eager there and then to put forth her hands to snatch the brand from the burning, he was sitting at his desk in the manager's room at the Civic.

There were books before him, the business books of the bank, over which he bent with a chalky face and frowning brows, with the pen between his fingers ; but he did not write. Thrice he dipped it, and hovered over a line or a figure ; thrice the ink dried, wasted on the nib. Ultimately he threw the pen from him with an oath, and, closing the books with a heavy thud, he swore at himself for a coward, and said :

‘I’ll do it to-morrow. My brain reels, my hand shakes ! I’ll try again to-morrow.’

Whatever it was he thought to try again on the morrow was never attempted. There are fiery swords nowadays to guard forbidden ground, and one was thrust in the manager’s face the next morning.

‘Let the memory of his past wrongs and his sweetness and goodness this day lead us to peace and farther from sin,’ Priscilla, the night before, had said in reference to their first-born. The words were still ringing in his ears, to conjure up that dagger of wrath, that bulwark of flame, to dance in vivid lights before him, and stay his hand. He did not waste time or ink with a trembling hesitation at the bank-books. But, locking himself in the strong-room, those precious bags, so weighty

yet so small, which had been deposited in his escritoire at Cecillambda just before Priscilla had surprised him with her overture of peace, were now hurriedly brought forth to light again, gripped with a nervous clutch; there was a white distorted face, a groan, and they fell from his long lithe fingers back to the receptacle from which they had been drawn not twenty-four hours earlier; then followed the shutting to of drawers and iron doors, and the fiery sword flashed victorious across the bloodshot eyes of a would-be thief at the threshold of tempting sin.

Next, hurrying to his own office, he turned to the lavatory, there to lave his hands, as if they were blood-stained, and needed the 'nitre' of holy writ, while he said in his heart:

'Poor 'Cilla! Will she ever know from what she has saved me?'

'Mr. Lockstud,' came a voice from without.

Lockstud, drying his hands on his towel, walked calmly to the door and opened it.

'If you please, sir, you are wanted,' said a clerk.

'Coming,' said Lockstud, who, apparently as cool and dignified as ever, strode from the manager's room, if not an honest man, at least

no more dishonest than when he had entered it that morning.

Who says an angel's wings had not interposed between him and further fall?

After this he waited for the olive-branch that Priscilla told him he might expect from Aunt Jessie, an olive-branch that might give him something to cling to as a possible rescue from the debt that submerged him; and in obeying her call, he resolved to make a full confession of his difficulties—not of the temptation to tamper with bank books and bags.

He could not in reason expect her to replenish his wasted thousands. Yet he looked to her to aid him in some way; not for his own sake as much as for the credit of the family.

Filled with vain longings and regrets, and with nerves at a high tension, he at length entered her house. But seeing Jessie, as he thought, with death stamped on her young face, his resolution faded away; he could not touch upon his losses that night.

Up to that time, though moved to contrition, he had yet struggled to subdue and smother an emotion which, in its novelty, was torture, since it tended to crush his self-esteem and turn him stone-deaf to a comfortable sophistry called up

for a salve, and becoming an irritant. Now, however, the struggle ceased, and the emotion, no longer fettered, broke from its restraint and mastered him, like the bursting of a man-made dam; the God-given water forced an outlet, and flooded his soul to pain and purification.

He listened to his aunt speaking of the book in the davenport, showing first a slight curiosity, and then an indifference, for he attached small importance to it.

'Probably,' he told himself, 'it tells of some girl's folly in my mother's early days, which she believed in keeping for my matured worldliness to judge, that it might be accepted with allowances, and not condemned too harshly.'

If the debt that oppressed him as it did became a minor grief in the presence of his daughter, and before the white face that haunted him after, it is small wonder that the existence of his mother's diary should fail to arouse in him a strong interest. So he left his aunt without having said a word in reference to his monetary position; but later on he thought he would see her again to-morrow, and speak of it then, her manner being rather an encouragement for him to confide in her. It never occurred to him to adopt for his own text certain words of hers used that night,

'Who knows what a day may bring forth?' Can it not be well understood now why he was the most miserable man in Phillipia?

He saw death advancing and debt pursuing—demons of his own evoking. His memory was charged with crime—'a hag to ride his dreams'; a spectre with fifty tongues jabbering and jeering eternally, 'Sin, debt, ruin, death'; a peal of infernal, witch-like bells clanging discordantly at his bed, his board, and his desk. Prometheus is a myth. We know it is against all organic laws that a liver should be gnawed at perpetually without decrease or decease. But human law does not forbid the heart to be stretched on a self-constructed rack, to crack and writhe and waste with its agony.

Rewards and punishments are meted out on earth, and whatever awaits us in that wonderful mysterious Future, it shall be some positive of the negative caught here below, in sunshine or shadow, the negative clear or blurred according to the stand we take—the light or the shade—before the abiding, omnipresent, holy camera, reflecting, recording word, deed, and thought for ever and for ever.

Lockstud suffered his sentence. He passed a sleepless night, and rose the next morning more haggard, more gray.

Priscilla's eyes filled when she saw him leave for the bank.

'Poor fellow!' she thought; 'how sorry—how awfully sorry he is!' But ought I to wish him to be less so?'

She did not worry him with sighs or tears, but did a score of little services to show her pity and prove her devotion, and only in her solitude cried out her sorrow. She was surprised when he returned about mid-day, for he generally lunched in the city, and never came home till the bank was closed.

'What is the matter? You are ill?' she questioned, dropping hurriedly some needle-work as she rose from her chair.

It fell unheeded on the floor.

'Not ill,' he replied, with an attempt at a laugh to reassure her, as much like a smile as a streak of lightning is like a sunbeam—'not ill, but hipped, worried. I couldn't breathe at the bank. I want a spell, and I'm going to have it for a few hours.'

She gazed anxiously up into his face. How very ill he looked! she thought.

'You must rest—you must lie down,' she urged, not knowing that for him to lie down idly would be no rest whatever.

'Lie down?' he repeated. 'No; I'm going

first to Aunt Jessie, and to see our Jessie again. Then I may be able to rest.'

Priscilla answered this quickly, and with some surprise :

'You bade them good-bye last night, I thought, and——'

'Yes, yes ; I know,' he interrupted. 'But I must see Aunt Jessie on an important business matter that can't wait, won't wait.'

'But, dear, they have gone to Wondoo. Didn't they tell you last night of their intention to start this morning ? They were here this morning after you left, on their way to the station, to say good-bye to the children and me.'

She could not understand the expression of dismay that crept over his face, or why he made a gesture of impatience as he walked to a lounge, and there, sitting, bent forward with his elbows on his knees, and nursed his head in his hands, as one meeting with a dire disappointment.

'I never thought to ask, nor she to tell me,' he said moodily.

'Why, Theo, what is wrong ?' she asked, going over to him, and taking a place at his side on the lounge.

It was in that little arbour of a room which



he, in a tender moment, had called 'Cilla's Bower,' before Roland had come to them, and where Aunt Jessie had reproved her for taking things too easily with her tripping, faulty husband ; where the vines were still clinging, and baby roses blossomed, bloomed, and faded, to blossom and bloom again ; where caged birds still hopped and chirped, and gold-fish sported in the sun-rays slanting through the trellis, and the breeze freely played and trifled now with the soft loose tendrils of her bleaching hair.

'What is wrong ?'

'Much.'

He never raised his head.

Her right hand stole to his neck fondly ; she nestled closer to him.

'Don't speak so, Theo ; you alarm me. Is it something that will not pass away with time ?'

'Yes,' he thought ; 'it will pass away like a whirlwind, perhaps, after sweeping all before it.'

It was on his lips to say, 'We are ruined,' but he held his peace, desperately clinging to his aunt as a means of averting catastrophe. He sighed, and shook his head only.

'Can't it wait till she comes back ?' queried Priscilla.

‘No ; I *must* see her at once.’

And then a sudden idea leaped to his brain like a flash to lighten the annoyance of learning she was at present beyond his reach.

He lifted his face, and turned to his wife as if to speak, but hesitated before he gave his resolution words.

‘I shall go to her. I shall start by this afternoon’s train. It will be the best.’

‘Is it so urgent?’ she faintly asked, her heart beginning to tremble with a nameless fear.

‘Very urgent.’

‘And can it be about money?’ she asked again.

‘About debt,’ he replied, forced to say something.

‘Debt!’ she exclaimed, with a painful start, thinking of what the word implied, and of all Aunt Jessie had already done for them with monetary help. ‘Debt! Oh, Theo! is it, can it be for a large amount?’

It occurred to her then that Roland, having alluded to these rumours of her husband’s habits, had not been misinformed, but her idea of the debt was wide of the reality, and her simplicity was unable to comprehend the depth to which a gambler may be hurled.

Hitherto avoiding anything like a scrutiny in words, which she knew he would not brook, she now broke forth into overwhelming interrogation in her eagerness to learn the worst, and comfort him if she could.

But he answered her with his wonted imperiousness, 'I can't attend to all your questions,' and rose from the lounge to walk from the room, and escape from what he felt to be Inquisitional torture.

Presently she heard him ordering one of the servants to pack up his dressing-case and a change of linen, and then she listened to his receding footsteps, and felt half dazed with a new terror as they gradually died away, and she guessed he had gone to the far-off room of his one-time exile.

She shivered, and knew not why, while an indefinable longing to accompany him to Wondoo so possessed her that she followed him to propose herself as his companion on the trip. She found him, as she expected, in that same room, but so busy at a small iron box, where letters and business papers were accumulated, that he did not notice her entrance. He was on his knees, fumbling amongst the paper litter, until he came across a letter which evidently concluded his search, for he ceased

the fumbling, and commenced to read it, but did not finish, for Priscilla gave a little cough, and immediately the letter was viciously ribboned, and the fragments fell from his fingers, tossed anyhow and anywhere, on to the floor. It was one of the few that had come to him from Isabella Goldwin—only a hurried, business-like letter, but still hers—bearing her signature, and one which he felt impelled to destroy, as if determined to sever all connection with the very name.

He shut-to the box with a sharp click as Priscilla faintly made her proposal, or rather her appeal.

‘Theo, I want to go with you to Wondoo. May I?’

‘It is best not.’ He spoke gently enough, but his negative was painful. He never looked at her, but flicked the dust from the knees of his trousers as he got up from his kneeling. ‘The trip will do me good, but there will be too much rushing over it for you. I will be back to-morrow, and at the bank.’

‘Ah! do take me with you. I don’t mind the rushing.’

She pleaded child-like, yet ready to obey his decision.

He was afraid to consent---afraid of failure

with Aunt Jessie, and the consequent desperation in himself that would make him a sorry companion.

'No,' he said, 'I must go alone;' and she turned away, importuning no more, but accepting his veto.

In less than ten minutes he left the house, saying he would be back in time for lunch, and he took a cab to drive as far as the young ladies' college where his second daughter was boarding. He wished to say good-bye to her for some inexplicable reason. As she was absent six days out of every week, only coming home on Sundays, he could have taken a run to Wondoo half a dozen times within the seven days without her being any the wiser; yet he went, and surprised her with his visit and unusual gentleness. He had been so churlish in the matter of his kisses and caresses towards his children that he quite understood her expression of wonderment, but not the transformation in himself which had caused it. Some invisible hand was seemingly urging him, willing him to act as he had never acted before.

Irresistingly, he became the agent of some occult force determining his movements his very words. The same force sent him driving

hurriedly back to the Civic Bank, ostensibly to give his son Jack a message relative to the business of the bank, but in reality to shake hands with him, and surprise him, too.

‘Going to Wondoo, is he?’ said Jack, with elevated eyebrows and shoulders, as he watched his father return to the cab. ‘But why this thusness? I never saw him look so down.’

And Jack looked at his right hand, still warm and tingling with the parting pressure, as if he would like to read there the meaning of it, and then drew it hastily across his eyes, which had suddenly gathered mist.

When the hour came for Lockstud’s departure from his home to meet the train, his buggy was kept waiting at the gate while he kissed his younger children, still in the school-room.

Priscilla looked on, her nerves strained, her heart in her throat. There is something pathetic in seeing the world-hardened man forget his coldness, and stoop to kiss a child with a new-born warmth of sentiment gracing his features and his action towards it. She felt it so, and when her turn came to say good-bye she could not speak the last word to him then. But she had an unexpected opportunity of trying again; for when he was only five minutes gone, he started as one does

with the memory of something important left undone, and with the impelling of that will which did not seem his own, he called aloud to his coachman :

'Drive back ; I have forgotten something.'

Right-about-face turned horse and buggy.

Returning, he alighted, and hurried to the 'harbour,' where he had left his wife. She was there still, but on her knees bitterly sobbing. He went over to her and raised her to her feet, and she, never stopping to think why he had come back, was only anxious to apologize for what seemed violent undue grief :

'Oh, Theo ! I can't help it. I never felt like this before when you have been going for a holiday. It must be seeing you so unhappy, and my inability to cheer you. It is the debt like lead on your heart and mine.'

He made no allusion to the debt, but held her in his arms as he spoke with difficulty :

'You have cheered me ; I have—come—back to tell you so. I have been a brute to you—no, don't stop me ; let me speak while the pride is wrenched away—I have been a brute in some things, have kept you from a worthier husband. 'Cilla—good little woman, faithful and true—forgive me, and—and pray for me ; I can't form a prayer for myself.

And here, take this'—he drew a little key from his waistcoat-pocket, and put it into her hand—'keep that till I come back. It belongs to Aunt Jessie; I might lose it, and if I don't come back——'

'Oh! what can you mean?' cried out Priscilla.

'Nothing, nothing!' he answered quickly, startled by her look, and rousing himself as if from a dream in which he had spoken aloud. 'Nothing! I don't know what I am saying. Of course I'll be back to-morrow. Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye!'

A burning kiss for each good-bye, hot tears on his face and hers, and he was gone.

She heard the rumbling of the buggy wheels, the wild pit-a-pat of her heart, and rushed to the front veranda to catch a last glimpse of the buggy as it swerved round a corner. And yet he meant to be home again on the morrow, and parting from him for a few days like this was no novelty.

But it was not the temporary separation that was oppressing her; it was the manner of it.

Theodore Lockstud was gone!



## CHAPTER IX.

### A HOPE AND A LIFE DOOMED TO PERISH.

To return to Una : the troubles of her friends had shadowed her. The Goldwin dénouement, the shutting up of Goolgun, Roland's overwhelming trouble, and Jessie's prostration and changed appearance, had inclined her also to much weeping, and even a desire to hide her head from the disgrace that seemed to touch her in sympathy with the friends to whom she was so deeply attached, whose pain was hers. That Jessie was physically as much as mentally affected, she knew ; so did Mrs. Calliport and Mrs. Lockstud ; but neither woman could note that something flickering on eye and lip which had mocked at Lockstud with a ghastly significance.

The idea of death hovering near was not borne to them, and Mrs. Calliport would not admit the thought suggested by her nephew's

abrupt question, 'Is she dying?' She put it away from her, but felt all the more eager to be out of Phillipia that her beloved charge might the sooner breathe the recuperating country air. Accordingly she decided to go on the following morning, avoiding a procrastination which might be serious, and called with Jessie to say good-bye at Cecillambda and Unaville, *en route* to the station. Una, to spare them the exertion of alighting from the cab, went out from the house to meet them.

Though the morning was warm and bright they were enwrapped in jackets and carried fleecy 'clouds'; and Mrs. Calliport, not to be wrenched entirely from the familiar and pleasant associations of her home, bore away two of her pets representing those associations; for Jumbo, her poodle, lay on the floor of the cab, curled into a brown fluffy ball, with half-shut eyes, watching intently Jenny Lind, the canary, as it hopped or flew from perch to perch in its gilt-wire cage, which was held in place on his mistress's lap.

Another cab followed with bag and baggage. Mrs. Calliport, wheezing a bit, insisted that she felt much better.

'I've been remiss to myself all these years,' she said to Una—'buried in my own house.'

But Una knew there was no 'self' in the movement, and that the old lady's country trip was as much a phenomenon as the effort to take it was meritorious. She would not let the girl go from her sight, and so she went with her to Wondoo.

Jessie was looking a shade brighter as she smiled at Una, holding her hand, and said with a poor imitation of her past vivacity :

'See what a weak little thing such as I can do—draw auntie away and out of Phillipia for miles.'

Then she bent closer and whispered something in Una's ear, which accounted for a transient renewal of the little flush in her cheek, and the feeble smile.

'Papa came to see us last night; we are all friends now, and I think I feel happier.'

'I knew they would be guided by Rol,' Una reflected as she returned to the house. 'Mrs. Calliport was so obstinate when I even hinted at reconciliation, and ruled Middie and Mrs. Lockstud alike. I knew Rol would prevail where I should fail.'

She understood now that her letter to Roland had fulfilled its purpose, and she experienced that happy sense of elation which fills us when satisfied with our own work.

‘Uncle,’ she announced at lunch-time, ‘peace is proclaimed at Cecillambda.’

The Captain set down his knife and fork for a second, looked at his niece across the table, knitted his shaggy white brows, and shrugged his broad shoulders.

‘Vagabond!’ he cried. ‘I’d see him hanged before I’d touch him with a yard-stick. I’d horsewhip him!’

Then he returned to his onslaught on a slice of cold ham, flourishing his knife as if it were a cat-o’-nine tails before it struck at the meat, to illustrate his desire for attack on the man whom he so thoroughly despised and condemned. He was not at all ready to give absolution to the bank-manager.

‘Probably,’ answered Una quietly, ‘you would see him hanged. But if you were his wife you would do just as she has done, or as his aunt and daughter have done—try to save him from the hanging.’

‘Lord bless my girl! are you going to plead for him?’ Captain Pennacove bristled with wrath. ‘He is going to the dogs as fast as he can, and as our tongues are tied and he can’t be packed off to his legitimate quarters, the dogs can have him and welcome, if a respectable dog would touch him.’

‘For shame, uncle’—Una coloured up and spoke out warmly, too—‘to talk like that of any human creature, especially of dear Mrs. Lockstud’s husband—of poor Jessie’s father! Supposing he does deserve gaol, are his family to send him to worse than gaol, perhaps, for the lack of one kind word? I think he has been desperately wicked, but I can’t think he is altogether irreclaimable, or that he ought to be cast adrift by his family and his family’s friends.’

‘Confound it, then!’ exclaimed the Captain, with less show of belligerence, however, and a dropping of his voice. ‘I can’t help hating the fellow, and if Larry was wretched because friendship interfered with justice, why, so am I. We would both send him where he ought to be.’

‘Uncle, I don’t believe you mean that; and if he has been wicked, I think it is likewise wicked for people who go to church and pretend to be guided by its doctrines of brotherly love and charity to accept them as a mere sentiment without any practical application. We might as well try to palm off false notes in exchange for our daily needs as try to satisfy the soul with the signs of a creed, or empty words which shall never purchase our own future salvation.’

The girl, flushing, spoke with a vehemence which now amused her uncle, for, laughing and

stretching forth his hand to pinch her cheek, he said good-humouredly :

“ ‘Oh, wise little Daniel!’ Shall we blow all the gaols in the world to smithereens and invite all the gaol-birds to a big lunch, eh?’

‘No,’ she replied gravely, ‘I would not recommend either. Unfortunately, the gaol is a necessary institution, and because it is so it supports my argument. If the love and charity preached were really practised, the gaols might crumble to dust, or, better still, never be erected. But they do exist, and always will; yet that is no reason why a duplicate should, so to speak, be raised by a man’s own kith and kin to wall him out from their little world like a pariah. If love and charity fail with Mr. Lockstud, it will be time enough to utterly ignore his claim to it—to utterly condemn him.’

‘Maybe you’re right, my girl,’ admitted the Captain, not unimpressed; ‘but love and charity are pretty names more often than not, like the shoddy velvets and cloths that gull the public with a false pile that looks like the real thing, with its cheap gloss, but won’t stand too strong a light or too much wetting, and is only for show, but not for use. Test it, and you’ll find a flimsy rag; and I’m afraid I’ve got a stock of shoddy on hand, like lots of others.’

Una here went over to her uncle and hung about him coaxingly.

'But, uncle dear, you must get rid of the shoddy material, and try and find the real, genuine article. If you try, you will find it, and you will say, "I am sorry for this miserable man, and if by word or deed of mine I can make *him* sorry for his misdeeds, I shall do a good thing; and if there's a chance of doing that good thing, neither word nor deed ought to be withheld."' '

Captain Pennacove now kissed the cheek, still rosy from the pinch, and said :

'Ay, ay, my girl! You'd soften a Herod. But even if I try to pitch the shoddy out of the window, there's sure to be some more left behind.'

It was customary after luncheon for the old man to take his siesta, and next a walk or a drive with Una, or alone; but as she expected Charlie Mountfu this afternoon to come and be perfected in a new song, the Captain was condemned to a solitary ramble.

She was practising the accompaniment as her uncle entered the drawing-room, hat and stick in hand, and inclined to make a joke of the discussion at lunch.

'I'm going now, Una, and if I feel like

throwing off the shoddy, and meet Mr. Gaol-bird, I'll say, "Come and be loved."'

Saying which, he would not wait to hear how she would take his jest, but walked out of the room and into the street, mumbling, 'Come and be loved indeed! Come and be kicked! Bah!'

As the hall clock with its prefatory whirr gave out five distinct strokes, Mountfu, up to time, made his appearance, and walked to the piano.

'Welcome, Signor Puntiglio,' said Una. 'You are true to your appointment.'

'True in all that concerns me with you, Una,' he responded wooingly.

'Am I to understand that you are not true to anybody else?' she asked lightly.

'You know well enough what you are to understand.'

'Of course I do. You are here for a singing lesson, and not to waste time in talk; so let us begin.'

She struck the keys with such a decisiveness, in sweeping chords, that they said for her, 'Come, sir, no nonsense!' But Mountfu bent and lifted her hands from the piano, holding her wrists with gentle force.

'You understand,' he answered with tender



accents and a pathos that alarmed her, 'that I have not come here only for a music lesson. It is not the singing alone that brings me here ; it is——'

'I hear a carriage!' cried Una, thus lopping a sentence that she wished to remain unspoken, as she rose hurriedly from the piano-stool. 'Let me go to the window and see.'

He dropped her hands sullenly, and dived his own into his trousers-pockets. It was ever the same thing ; his wooing made no progress. Una always evaded him like a coy little bird, not to be caught with sweet grain. And he was so desperately in love that even his worldly position, at present mediocre, did not deter him from letting it be recognised, or make him less sanguine of success. He thought she must reciprocate his steady, deep affection, the growth of years, and now fully ripened.

'Your lesson is doomed for a time to stand over, Charlie,' she called from the window. 'Here come visitors for me—the Lannagers.'

'Then I'll go away, and come back after the prescribed ten minutes of the visit shall expire.'

'You will do nothing so rude, sir,' she said in a jesting tone, but with a serious face. 'You will not leave me to bear the infliction alone ; and they will meet you going out as they come

in, and construe the action discredibly, or, rather, misconstrue it.'

With that the street-door bell, with its silvery electric peal, rang out a summons for attendance.

Charlie made an exclamation under his breath which was neither elegant nor courteous, since it consigned the Lannagers to some undeserved perdition for their malapropos call; and his countenance was not suggestive of sweetness as mother and eldest daughter, with rustling silks, were ushered into the drawing-room.

They were both effusive, but the elder lady more so, with her wide, fixed smile, as she wrung Una's hand, and poured forth eager questions relative to her and her uncle's health, as if their welfare was the one thing needful to send her cup of happiness running over. Receiving satisfactory replies, she expressed an extravagant delight, and next generously diffused some of this frothy loquacity in Charlie's direction, upon whom it was wasted, and to which he responded shortly.

'And how is your *dear* little friend--such a *charming* little creature -Miss Lockstud?' she asked, turning to Una. 'We heard that she was ill, and feel *so* very *distressed* about it.'

‘Oh yes, how is she?’ came like a refrain from the daughter.

‘Very much better to-day,’ was the reply. ‘She looked ever so much better;’ and Una’s eyes brightened.

‘Oh, you saw her to-day—how nice!’ said Miss Lannager. ‘Mamma and I would so much like to see her.’

‘We never called upon Mrs. Calliport, you know,’ said Mrs. Lannager; ‘but do you think’—here her head went on one side insinuatingly—‘if we called to see her now she would be indignant, and think we only came to see her niece? She is such a *dear* old lady. I would like to know her better.’

Una, not feeling able to answer for Mrs. Calliport’s manner of accepting Mrs. Lannager’s visit, was glad to be able to say at once that she and Jessie had gone to Wondoo.

The Lannagers and the full coterie of the Lockstuds did not know how very ill Jessie had been. The prevailing impression was that she had met with an accident at her aunt’s house, and so was confined there until able to be removed. It could not be guessed that she was kept there to escape the influx of friends who would be certain to worry her with well-meant intentions. And it may be remembered

that Mrs. Calliport's social circle was particularly limited through her own reserve, which now served poor Jessie well in her desire to get away from everybody but the especial few who loved her and wept for her sincerely.

But surmise as to the nature of the accident was busy, and Frank Lannager, who was just as much in earnest about her as Mountfu was about Una, called daily at Cecillambda to inquire after her; but knowing she was at Mrs. Calliport's, he sent a bouquet every morning there, without card or any intimation of the donor's name, which was scarcely necessary, for Jessie guessed from whom it came, but only sighed and pitied when she thought of him.

When Mrs. Lockstud gave out that her daughter was the victim of an accident, she scarcely accused herself of a subterfuge, because she thought a broken or bruised heart a serious disaster too—the worst of accidents.

‘Gone to Wondoo — again?’ exclaimed mother and daughter alike interrogative.

Una nodded her head and gave a quiet ‘Yes.’

‘Is it safe for her to travel yet?’ asked Mrs. Lannager, still smiling. ‘She broke her ankle, did she not? How *distressing* for her!’

‘We did hear that her spine was injured,’

here put in Miss Lannager, with a concern not quite feigned ; ‘but that is not true, is it?’

‘No,’ answered Una with hidden pain, ‘decidedly not.’

‘I am *so* glad you can say so ; for, of course, you must know,’ said the mother again, eager to find out what was really the matter. ‘People do exaggerate so, you know, and we should have enough to do to believe all we hear. Perhaps the accident is not so serious, after all.’

‘Perhaps not,’ said Una, not taking kindly to the sounding process. ‘I told you she was much better.’

‘Well, we are woefully disappointed to have missed seeing her. We really ought to have called on Mrs. Calliport before. Lottie here’—Mrs. Lannager glanced towards her daughter—‘is positively *dying* to see her—such a *delightful* little creature!’

Miss Lannager, whose well-knit frame and general air of brightness did not betoken anything of a moribund tendency, laughed and said :

‘Oh, I shall live long enough to see her again, and soon, I hope ; but I am not the only one “dying” on her account.’

‘Nonsense!’

Mrs. Lannager’s eyes shot a gleam of annoy-

ance, in peculiar contrast with that perpetual smile. Perhaps her daughter's playful toss of her word 'dying' was offensive, and she could not hide its effect. However, she suddenly dropped the subject of Jessie to take up Jessie's father, and apply the sound again to Una.

'How is Mr. Lockstud? He looks quite another man. I am sure he must be ill. Do you know?'

Mrs. Lannager had not only heard distorted rumours of Jessie's illness, but of her father's late unlucky speculations as well. Longing to get at the truth, she yet was not sure how the pumping system would befriend her with Miss Pennacove, but was anxious to try it on.

Seeing Una hesitate, Charlie unconsciously did her a real service, for he answered for her laconically :

'Bile.'

Mrs. Lannager was not satisfied, evidently, for she shook her head, and spoke without looking at anybody.

'Bile may make people horribly melancholy and wretchedly yellow, but not positively old and gray. He has aged twenty years the last six weeks. Now, hasn't he?'

'I think he must be suffering in some way,' said Una, taking refuge in an equivocation.

‘Yes; to be sure he must. How painful to think of it!’ Mrs. Lannager thought she was getting on. ‘I hear that he lost heavily on Asahel—did you?—heavily enough to make most men look ill; but, my dear, I wouldn’t believe it. Of course, it’s no business of mine; but is it true, do you think? I’m not inquisitive, you know; but he is such a *charming* man. It is a pity if it is true, eh?’

Mrs. Lannager’s head tilted slightly on one side, and her eyes rested searchingly on Una’s face.

‘It is a case of “They say,” Mrs. Lannager,’ answered Una, with an uneasiness she could not conceal from the sharp observation of the questioner. ‘And “They say” is an abominable pest, often misleading, and never to be fully relied upon. No doubt he has much to worry him, and his friends would be kinder, I think, not to raise reports likely to increase his worries.’

Miss Lannager caught a certain inflection in the word ‘friends’ which, like a gentle prick of a rebuke, reminded her that her parents were presumably friends of the Lockstuds. So she quickly answered, before her mother could speak:

‘Quite right, Miss Pennacove; so they should. And if Mr. Lockstud has a rebellious

liver, as Mr. Mountfu supposes, he will get over it, and "They say" will have its tongue tied, and serve it right. Come, mamma; we have other calls to make.'

They went, and Mountfu's parting was more fervent than his welcome had been.

'I fancy,' observed Miss Lannager, seated in the carriage next to her mother, 'that we interrupted an interesting *tête-à-tête*, and Charlie Mountfu has much the same complaint as our Frank.'

'And I fancy,' said Mrs. Lannager, only intent upon one subject, 'that there *is* something shady about the Lockstuds, and Frank must be made cautious.'

'Goodness!' ejaculated the young lady. 'Why, you almost forced him to pay attention to Jessie, and now that the attention has led to actual love on his part, you want him to fall out of love again, just like a circus-dog trained to fly through a hoop backwards and forwards, according to the way you hold it.'

'Absurd! and you must hint at his idiocy before that girl.'

'"That girl" knows all about it, and doesn't need any hints.'

Miss Lannager tossed her head at the implied correction.



‘Well, I don’t care what she knows,’ rattled the mother *sotto voce*, and looking towards the coachman, ‘about him, but she *does* know more about Lockstud’s affairs than she will admit. Jessie will not get a penny, perhaps, and she knows it, and isn’t likely to stand in the light of an excellent match for her friend by proclaiming the fact. Frank *must* be put on his guard.’

‘And if Mr. Lockstud had been successful in speculation, what then?’ asked Miss Lanager.

‘What then? Why, he would have been lucky, and it would not be a duty on our part to break off any likely connection. Your father and I never mix too freely with unlucky people; it isn’t safe. You never know but what, like drowning men, they may cling too close, and drag you down to drown with them.’

Mountfu, having escorted the ladies to their carriage, returned to Una, once again to breathe freely; and she, evidently determined to proceed with the singing-lesson, had reseated herself at the piano, and recommenced the accompaniment. But though he stood at her side, he did not attempt to sing.

‘Any more coming?’ he began in jest, yet

with a dash of gravity. 'Let me know if the roll of carriage-wheels should greet your quick ears, before they pull up at the door. I am unequal to a second strain of the kind.'

'You would have been discourteous had you run away,' she answered quietly. 'As it was, you were a help to me.'

'Was I? Now, that's the kindest thing you have said to me yet.'

He dropped his voice dangerously.

'I declare I will say something positively unkind if I have to play this accompaniment over again for nothing. So now to business; and, remember, when I pause on a note, you are to take it as a sign to pause too. Now.'

Once more she struck the keys, and rippling chords seemed to echo her 'Now.'

'Ahem!'

Mountfu cleared his throat, but, ignoring the music and her peremptory 'Now,' he looked at her fair slender hands; from the hands he glanced to her profile; then at the shapely head, with its wealth of wavy blonde hair.

'Well,' she said almost sharply; 'begin.'

'Very well,' he replied, with a shade of mischief in his eyes, blending with the admiration she evoked; 'I am going to begin; but please remember when I pause you are to do the same.'

‘What *do* you mean?’ she asked, with a touch of anger colouring her tone and manner.

‘Don’t be vexed with me, Una. I *can’t* sing to-day.’

He moved his hands and arms nervously, walked off a few paces, circumnavigated a gipsy table, and came back again to stand near her.

‘I mean to pause, if you will let me, and to sing the song that is nearest my heart, and on my tongue—not *that* one to-day.’ He pointed to the music set before her. ‘It is—oh, Una, it is, “Tell her I love her so”!’

Una involuntarily gave forth a discordant jangle. He ought to have understood it as a want of harmony with his outspoken sentiment. She was about to speak, but he interrupted her :

‘Don’t say a word yet. You are too good to hurt a living creature wilfully ; but if you fence with me you will hurt me. You have always put me off with raillery ; but say you never meant harm by it—that is, indifference. I love you—I love you ; and if you will try to love me just a little, I will try so hard to be worthy of you. I will make some way in the world, and not be always in my present position. I’ll leave the clerkship behind, and when you find me getting on at something

better you will know how sincere I am. Oh, Una darling !

He put out his hand to take one of hers, but she snatched it away, and pressed her eyes with it. What she had warded off so long with playfulness—like Tennyson's parrot, biting the dainty finger 'more for true heart than harm'—had come at last, and met with a reception which was not entirely calculated upon.

'Have I asked too hard a thing?' he murmured sadly.

'Yes,' she answered at length, dropping her hand, and looking vacantly at the piano—'too hard a thing. I *have* meant all I have said have wilfully misunderstood you, that you might be spared the pain of a fruitless confession. I wanted you to understand that, and you would not. I am sorry.'

'To understand the "fruitless confession" ?'

'Yes, yes. Oh, Charlie, let us still be friends—good friends—the best of friends !'

Her eyes were cast down, her lips trembled like her accents, and he drew nearer with an elbow on the top of the piano, his body bent to her, and scanned her face as he questioned her in a voice not quite like his own :

'Am I such a miserable fellow that I can only inspire friendship ?'

‘No ; you will inspire more than that some day, and wonder at your folly in thinking you once cared so much for me.’

‘Never.’

All the happy mischief in his face gave way to a remarkable gravity in one always inclined to merriment.

‘I could be content with so little, if you would give it me.’

She rose from the piano, and held out her hands to him. They were immediately clasped in his.

‘No ; a little would not content you,’ she said. ‘A good man deserves all the love of the woman he is to wed. I can’t give it you, though you have made me fond of you ; and if you were richer or poorer, it would make no difference to me, could I feel for you as you do for me.’

‘That is your answer—your final answer ?’ he asked, still hand-linked with her.

‘Yes.’

He bowed his head, and released her hands, and then in a muffled tone said :

‘Good-bye.’

‘Good-bye for to day,’ she replied. ‘You must come again, and forget this afternoon. I wanted you not to speak, and the speaking has

caused us both pain. Let us try and forget it. I can't afford to lose a friend.'

'You may be better able to forget than I!' he said, and a sudden pang of jealousy set his lips in sullenness, while, by some intuitive process, his thoughts went out over the sea, over the land, even as far as Knutsford.

At the garden-gate, as he was making his exit, he met the Captain just about to enter.

'What is the matter?'

It was Mountfu who put the question, without any greeting; for the old man's face had lost its ruddiness, and his eyes had that dazed look which mostly follows a shock.

The Captain, for answer, put his arm through the young man's, as if for support or companionship, and drew him inside the gate again and back to the house.

'Where's Una?' he asked, somewhat feebly.

'I left her in the drawing-room,' said Mountfu, rather reluctant to return to the scene of his discomfiture; but when they entered the room together Una was not there. 'Shall I call her to come to you?' asked Charlie, fearing the Captain was ill, as he watched him mopping his head with his silk handkerchief, while the cold perspiration stood in beads on his forehead.

‘No, no;’ and the Captain sat down heavily on his easy-chair, still busy wiping. ‘She’ll hear it fast enough, I’ll be bound. Let her be. Lord bless my girl! How cold it is! Open that cupboard, will you?’ he said, pointing to a marble-topped, mirrored chiffonniere, ‘there’s a good fellow, and bring us the whisky and a tumbler. Don’t call anybody. You’ll find it there all right.’

Mountfu had no difficulty in putting his hand on a decanter, necklaced with a silver label, inscribed ‘Whisky’; and with a tumbler carried it to the Captain, who, with a shaking hand, poured out a third of a glass and tossed it off neat.

‘There, that’ll warm my old blood!’ he cried. ‘I am not as young as I was.’

‘What is the matter?’ asked Mountfu again, with pardonable curiosity. ‘What has frightened you?’

‘Frightened me! I should think so—the biggest scare I’ve ever had! There’s been an accident—fatal.’

‘To somebody you know?’

‘Good Heaven, yes! Theodore Lockstud is dead—killed!’

‘Dead!’ exclaimed Mountfu, terribly shocked.

‘Dead as a ducat—guillotined on the railway.’

‘I don’t understand,’ faltered Mountfu, feeling suddenly sick with the tidings, and turning as white as the bearer of them.

‘I can’t quite do that myself. I’ve been for a drive, and was passing the terminus, and saw a crowd rushing towards the station. “What’s on?” I called to the driver. “Accident, sir, I think,” he said. “We’ll drive up and see,” I said; and we drove forward with the crowd. It was not a railway accident, but an accident on the railway. An accident, they told us, to a man travelling by the three Southern train up-country. He was putting his head out of the window, as people will do, and a down-train was coming on with a door unlocked and flying open. It rushed passed the up-train, and that open door guillotined the head that was pushed through the window on the up-train. It belonged to Lockstud. I can’t realize it. Give me a little more whisky.’

Mountfu, feeling faint, helped the Captain again, and helped himself as well.

‘Are you sure it was Lockstud?’ he asked.

‘Wish I wasn’t. He was talking to somebody he knew a second before, a gentleman, who sounded the alarm, and brought the body back to Phillipia, to the morgue.’

Mountfu sat down like one stupefied, and the



Captain renewed his mopping at a fresh burst of clamminess ; mopped his hands and head and face, and shivered as he thought of his jest that afternoon, and the headless trunk lying at the morgue.

‘ How shall we tell Una, and his wife ? and—good Lord——’

The Captain’s thoughts now went in the same direction as Mountfu’s had a little while ago—away to Knutsford, to Roland Goldwin ; but he did not complete his sentence, for he abruptly closed his lips and went on flurrying with his handkerchief.

It had to be told.

Before another twenty-four hours were gone it was known far and wide—flashed abroad.

Theodore Lockstud had succumbed to this last unlucky hit—was decapitated, and, let us hope, ransomed.

## CHAPTER X.

### HOW THE PRESS TELEGRAMS AFFECTED THREE INDIVIDUALS.

ABOUT a hundred and thirty miles from Phillipia there is a district not old enough to have lost its country blush or verdure, yet sufficiently advanced to have a large central city of some commercial importance, with a large agricultural and pastoral interest supporting it. We will call it Debella.

At walking distance from the city, more towards the line of country, there stood rather a heavy, wide-spreading and lofty building of brick, set in a fair area of cultivated grounds, and enclosed with a tall, strong iron railing, with its carriage gates and wickets.

Nobody could mistake it for a private residence, frowning grimly, as it seemed, on the outside spectator. Yet Mercy and Munificence had reared it, and, within, the garden, fresh and

blooming, somewhat redeemed it from its un-homelike aspect. It was the Debella hospital.

The sun, not long risen, partly brightened the eastern portion, while the rest, still shadowed from the early rays, stood cold and firm. There were already signs of early - rising workers, for smoke curled lazily from the rear chimneys, and a woman could be seen on a balcony sweeping down a wall, and farther on, over the balcony rails, a blanket and sheet flapped gently in the morning breeze.

Presently one of the wickets opened and another woman emerged from the garden to the roadside and walked briskly away. A slim, active woman she was, with sunken eyes and drab-gray hair, and clothed in black--a black-straw mushroom hat and black mittens, which exposed lean fingers. She was one of the probation nurses, hard-worked, never complaining, and about to take her daily hour of out-door exercise. We have seen her before. It was Mrs. Dripper.

Nimble-footed, she sped towards the town, till she entered one of its streets with shuttered shops, and passed private homes, where the tradesmen's carts were trundling on their way, and milkman, baker and butcher announced their presence by an occasional shout, accord-

ing to their respective burdens, or a housemaid, in the act of shaking a doormat or furbishing a knocker, stopped to stare curiously at the gray-haired nurse; and a bare-legged news-boy, with a pack of newspapers under arm, and a hand curved at his mouth, bawled, '*Debella Her—ald!* Row in the 'ouse! Terrable con—fler—gra—tion. Shocking ac—cerdent!' etc. This was what had impelled Mrs. Dripper to the town. She wanted a paper, and carried a coin with her for its purchase. Sometimes she had not the coin to spare; to-day, having one, she was anxious to know something of current events, and so held out her money and received a *Herald*, soft, damp, and fresh from the press. Paper in hand, she retraced her steps towards the hospital, intending to enter the People's Park, about a quarter of a mile ahead, where she could sit down and economize by taking some of her hour in the open air, and indulge in reading at one and the same time.

Arriving at the park, she rested on a bench under a broad-shading fig-tree, where she could rest her back and read quite comfortably.

The tree-boughs rocked, and their leaves, dew-bespangled, glistened in the sunshine; birds twittered sweetly, and hopped from branch to branch; sometimes their little heads turned

sideways, and a bright eye, with evident distrust, rested on the woman who sat beneath. The locusts, in a noisy chorus, began their hoarse chirping, and the dew still lay upon the ground like frost ; while a sweet scent of young grass and wild-flowers permeated the atmosphere.

It was early yet for visitors to the park : Mrs. Dripper thought she had it all to herself ; so she had at the outset, but, engrossed in her reading, the minutes sped rapidly and brought newcomers.

A laughing jackass, perched near by, laughed out his notes ; she took no notice, and he laughed again, stretched his wings, and soared elsewhere to find appreciation of his morning greeting.

The birds above her, concluding she was harmless, warbled blithely, but soon had their fears aroused again by a stifled scream. The woman had dropped the paper and given vent to an exclamation of horror. With one accord they in terror fluttered from the tree and flew out of harm's reach.

The woman's head had fallen forward on her hands ; a shudder convulsed her, and, rocking herself in an agony of thought, she cried aloud :

‘ Oh ! oh ! Lord have mercy on his soul, and mine ! ’

'As oo dot a pain?' came a baby voice at her ear, and a tiny silk-gloved hand came lightly on her wrist. 'Poor 'ooman, is oo ill?'

The crying ceased, and Mrs. Dripper raised her head from her hands, to see a dot of a girl at her knee, staring wistfully at her with tender brown eyes, and dressed in deep mourning.

'Yes, yes, darling!' moaned Mrs. Dripper; 'a terrible pain! a frightful pain! Dear little girl, where do you come from?'

The child was about to reply, when a peremptory voice, a woman's, rang out somewhere near:

'Elsie, naughty girl! come here this minute.'

Mrs. Dripper started up from the bench. The voice startled her into a sudden eagerness to see the owner. She turned sharply round, and saw, standing a few feet off, by another tree, a lady whose back was turned to her, showing a stylish figure well dressed.

The figure and the voice were alike so painfully familiar that impulsively she walked swiftly towards the lady and rudely peered into her face, as well as she could, for a light gossamer curtained it.

The lady drew herself up proudly, and the gossamer hid the hate and fear that dilated her

pupils. Hurriedly catching at the child's hand, she said, in a lower tone :

‘Come away; she is mad! You are a naughty girl to speak to all sorts of people.’

The child covered her eyes with a little round arm, as if to cry, and half running, to keep pace with the quick footsteps of her leader, went whimpering away.

Mrs. Dripper stared after them, and, now that privacy was over, decided to leave the park, for it was lively with nursemaids and their charges, toddling at their skirts or wheeled in perambulators—with girls trundling hoops and boys kite-flying—with workmen, after an early breakfast, shouldering their tools and plodding onward to the day's labour; but the lady and child were gone, and Mrs. Dripper, dazed with the tidings given in a lengthy paragraph, a telegram, relative to Theodore Lockstud's death, tormented with the likeness she had observed in the lady to one with whom she was but too well acquainted, went her way sorely troubled and mentally crying :

‘I could have sworn it was her, and that she hadn't gone to Europe at all, only her hair is coal black, and I saw black brows through the veil. She thought I was mad, and no wonder! Only to think of it; the man is dead - killed,

and like that! What should happen to her and to me? Who knows? God forgive me! What right have I to blame her or him? None.'

Thus reflecting, Mrs. Dripper returned to the hospital. The lady and child hastened away, unconscious of the stare that followed them, and when little more than a stone's-throw from the park entered a rustic, cosy little cottage. The lady was in no amiable mood, as evinced by her angry look and her action towards the child, who had to submit to renewed scolding, accompanied with a shake by the arm.

'You little imp, if you ever speak to that woman again I'll half kill you!'

'She dot a pain,' blubbered the little girl, with benevolence already active.

'And you will get a pain if you disobey me.'

The lady, who was known at the cottage as Miss Gelden, breakfasted with the child, who sat demure as any prim old-fashioned dame, with luxuriant brown curls tumbling in charming confusion over brow and shoulders, and eyes large and wistful, mostly fixed on her plate, only lifted occasionally to cast timid glances at her companion, of whom she was afraid.

A pretty child, the daughter of a well-to-do



millar, recently a widower, and so overcome with grief at his loss that, his health suffering, he was compelled to travel by command of the doctor. Before doing so, however, he was anxious to procure somebody besides his servants with whom to entrust his little girl for the few months of his absence from home. He advertised for a lady to take her in charge, and likewise superintend the house. Out of several applicants he chose Miss Gelden, whose manner and address impressed him favourably, which, taken together with the fact of her having long passed girlhood, and showing references which he accepted upon her bare word, gave him full confidence in her capability for the position. Waiting a fortnight, however, after her installation to note how the child and she got on together, he left for a tour of the colonies, well satisfied at having secured Miss Gelden's services, for during that fortnight she was as mild and motherly as it was possible for an utter stranger to be. He had requested her to have strict charge of his little girl, and to take her out daily. But Miss Gelden, for some reasons of her own, objected to going out any time in the day but the early morning, and so respected her employer's wishes by taking Elsie to the

park every day but Sunday, between six and seven a.m.

With his departure her sweetness and gentleness took sudden flight, for she often failed in patience with the wilful ways of Elsie, as well as with the defects and shortcomings of the servants, his absence giving a free rein to a vindictive and exacting temperament hitherto curbed.

So little Elsie, cowed into unnatural quietness, sat silent, spooning her porridge, while Miss Gelden ate her breakfast and looked over the morning paper. Then something very unusual happened.

Miss Gelden fell back in her chair ; her eyes started, her hand crumpled the paper with spasmodic and involuntary working, her face set like stone.

Elsie stared at her in childish wonder and some alarm.

Miss Gelden next fiercely struck the table gong and waited for a servant to attend.

Susan, the housemaid, hurried to the breakfast parlour.

'See to that child. I am ill!' all but gasped Miss Gelden, who, having disposed of her charge, walked hastily to her own room.

About two hours after, when she was sup-

posed to be lying down, Susan and Elsie were surprised to see her standing before them equipped for walking, and shadowing the pantry-door. Susan, with sleeves rolled up to her elbows, sat within the pantry with Elsie on her knees, while the pantry work stood in abeyance, the breakfast things littered on the shelf, awaiting till the adventures of Jack the Giant-killer were all told to the eager little listener. She quickly put the child from her lap, conscious of her idling, and expecting sharp rebuke. It did not come, for Miss Gelden was too ill or too self-absorbed to note the delinquency.

‘I am going to Phillipia by the twelve train,’ she announced, ‘and can’t be back till to-morrow. Can you manage without me?’

‘Oh yes, miss,’ responded Susan, with an accent joyful enough not to have escaped the lady’s notice at any other time. ‘Are you better, miss?’

‘Yes.’ With this curt monosyllable Miss Gelden disappeared from the pantry door, and hurried from the house. When at a safe distance Susan caught hold of the child as a partner in a dance, sang ‘Oh, how delightful!’ to the waltz measure, and tripped out of the pantry on to the veranda, then all round the

house, with her skirts flying wildly and Elsie's thick curls at a horizontal swing, as they whirled and panted and laughed at this most unexpected freedom.

\* \* \* \* \*

Theodore Lockstud's funeral was a long one, and, saving one exception, had all male followers. The female was not from the mourning coach, and provoked supposition from the many who were not sufficiently depressed by the proceedings to keep their eyes from roving and taking observations.

Jack Lockstud, Captain Pennacove, the clergyman, and the family doctor, were of the mourning coach. They stood at the grave-edge, Jack with eyes lowered and nostrils slightly quivering with emotion suppressed, the others appropriately solemn. The woman stood some distance off, attired in a dark ulster, and with a brown gossamer drawn in full folds over a low broad-brimmed hat, which set closely down upon her face.

The ceremony over, the cortège slowly wended its way out of the cemetery, and the woman, watching stealthily, advanced as the grounds cleared. She was left alone by the newly-made grave.

Then, with the cry of a wounded, fatally hit

creature, she fell on her hands and knees, groveling at the mound.

'Your heart was not all mine,' she muttered; 'you were a sneak, false to the love you professed, selfish, cold; and you loved that boy you called a hero, the boy who has driven me abroad an outcast, a scapegoat in the wilderness to rid him of the sin I would have fixed on him unknown, who makes me suffer for his heroism! Oh, let him be cursed! I hate him, and I love you—have always loved you when I thought I hated. Fool! idiot! to love you and ask to die for you, if that might have been. Now, what is life but storm, and death but oblivion of all? Sweet oblivion be mine. I must die! I will die—I shall die! For what shall I live?'

And the miserable woman moaned and groaned, and away at Debella, Elsie, light-hearted and joyous with removed restraint, clapped her hands and laughed and prattled, and the boy—the hero—was being borne along by rail from Greycott, and was more than half-way to Etoco—each influenced by this one man's death, though not alike.

Roland the day previous had received a telegram from Captain Pennacove—a vague message, which only told him of a fatal accident

to Lockstud, in kindly preparation for the tidings that were to follow, as he anticipated, but which, as it happened, preceded it. The *Greycott Banner* had its 'wire' communication, and, glad of something sensational to swell its columns, to excite the public mind and triple sales for that day, caught at this especial 'wire' and made the most of it, enlarging with graphic force on sickening details. Alec Gower sent a messenger into Greycott every day for letters, messages and papers, so that Roland's telegram and the *Banner* reached the station at the same time, in the same bag. But the paper being handed first, Roland, waiting for the sorting of the letters, opened it without any particular eagerness to read until the telegraphic paragraph, headed in startling capitals, caught his eye :

'BANK MANAGER BEHEADED IN A RAILWAY CARRIAGE.'

And then he read on like one in a hideous dream, and with a fancy that the dead man could not be one and the same with the Theodore Lockstud he knew, but must be another of the same name. With dulled senses that rendered him incapable of realizing fully what he read, he mechanically took the telegram from somebody's hand -he knew not whom -and for a time, unconscious that he

held it, betook himself to his own quarters to try and think in solitude.

It became known soon that Roland's telegram had brought him some bad news, for he did not appear at the Gowers' ample board that night, and, moreover, refused to eat when called upon, and had shut his door against all intruders.

It was only the following morning that Gower learned what the bad news was.

Prompted by some uneasiness, he called at Roland's room almost at daybreak to make inquiries, and found the door wide open and the bird flown.

With a comical expression of wonderment, he stepped into the room and investigated. There were certain signs of packing and flight: an open trunk with tossed clothing, a litter of papers, some loose trifles, forgotten, perhaps, in hurry, and the bed, not having been occupied, just as it was made the day before.

All this Gower took in at a glance, and upon further search discovered a note, addressed to himself, which was to throw some light on the matter.

‘DEAR MR. GOWER,’ it said,

‘You will pardon me running off like this. The fact is I cannot rest, for I must go

to Phillipia. My dearest friends are in trouble ; they may need me, and I feel not an hour is to be lost. The bank-manager whose terrible end was announced in yesterday's *Banner* was the father of a family with whom I was as one. You can understand my distress. I am going to take Titania to carry me to Greycott to meet the down-train to Etoco, and Sprightly will accompany me in order to bring her back. My kindest regards to Mrs. Gower, and thanks for all your kindness to me—hers and yours. All going well, I hope to return.

‘Yours truly,

‘ROL.’

Gower's comment on this was a whistle in the first place, and then, ‘In the name of rum gumption, what does he mean by galloping off when he's half dead with the scare, without an ounce of food in his stomach, and never a wink of sleep the night?’ He looked at the bed and its perfectly smooth covering, and whistled again. ‘It's unco guid he's got plenty o' siller ; he'd never make any for himsel', he's too softie. Noo I must go home and tell the wife.’

So it came to pass that Roland, having grasped the miserable situation at last, felt impelled to rush to Phillipia. He had ousted



Sprightly from his couch of skins, and had coaxed him out of a heavy sleep to catch and saddle up the horses with a liberal promise of tobacco on arrival at Greycott by way of indemnity.

Not long after midnight the white man, with his black escort, was travelling towards Greycott at a smart canter, with the clatter of the horse-hoofs beating a second to the quick thud of the heart at his breast.

## CHAPTER XI.

### FRIENDS IN NEED.

CAPTAIN PENNACOVE broke the news to his niece after much deliberation and when he was steadier nerved.

Mountfu left him to his own resources, with a horror of scenes and tears, especially when it was possible that Una might figure prominently.

But there was no scene at all.

Finding that Una was remaining longer away than usual, the Captain sought her. She was in her own little study, but not studying, excepting, perhaps, the problem of roguish Love, which will play pranks, and set his victims too often worshipping at the wrong shrine. He knocked at the door.

‘Can I come in?’ he asked.

The door opened immediately, and Una stood there.

‘Do you want me, uncle?’

There was a wistfulness in her eyes, a suspicion of moisture on the lashes.

He noted both with the quick eye of love, but did not stop to inquire the cause, for her expression accorded with his own humour and helped him to make his communication. Had she met him with her usual brightness, the task of telling her anything which should mar it would have been difficult to him. He looked at her very earnestly, and wound an arm about her waist as he drew her back into the study.

‘Yes, my girl, I want to speak to you,’ he began nervously. ‘You’re not angry with me, are you?’

‘Angry! Why?’

Una smiled faintly. His mood was peculiar, even unnatural, to him; it pained her somehow.

‘Because of what I said at lunch, you know.’

‘About Mr. Lockstud?’

‘Yes, about him.’ He placed a chair for her, and sat down quite closely to it, but turned his eyes from her face now to stare at the carpet. ‘I thought you might be vexed still; but don’t let it—don’t let it vex you. I feel different about it now.’

‘Do I look vexed at this moment, uncle?’ she asked, with a forced and uneasy laugh, meant to cheer him, and trying to forget her interview with Charlie, who was responsible for the sadness she could not hide. ‘I was vexed, or rather hurt, because, you know, it was not right to——’

‘Yes, yes,’ he interrupted, ‘I know it wasn’t right, and I’ve come here to tell you so. I’m real sorry, and if I could see the fellow now before me I’d shake his hand hard, Una, and forgive him too, as sure as my name is Timothy Pennacove and I’m an old man.’

He looked so contrite, so crestfallen, as he sat there in dejection, leaning forward on the arms of his chair, seemingly counting the carpet-stitches, and with that gray, pallid tint in his complexion instead of the ruddiness, that Una’s anxiety—always on the alert for him in his advancing years—took the blood from her own cheeks, and she said quickly, with the idea of rousing within him his happier temperament :

‘Of course you are sorry, though you never meant half that you said ; I knew that quite well. Your tongue belied your heart. Supposing you and I go to Cecillambda this evening, and meet him as if nothing had happened. We will help his wife to do him good.’

‘No, not that!’—he floundered helplessly here for a second—‘not that! We can’t do that!’ Next, he suddenly lifted his head and asked: ‘You never thought overmuch of him, did you? He wasn’t a great friend of yours? I don’t think he was, eh?’

‘No, uncle; I never could feel a strong liking for such a man as Mr. Lockstud. Yet I always feel a pity for him, something like one feels, perhaps, when a deformed or afflicted creature appeals to the sympathy of his fellows. After all, such a disposition as his is a deformity of its kind. We have no right to mock at it.’

‘That’s true, I dare say, my girl, and that’s why I am sorry. Now, would it distress you very much to hear that he had hurt himself in any way—say, with a fall or a blow, for instance?’

‘Uncle!’ Una cried, with a quick intuition of evil tidings awakened by his manner, ‘you have heard something, you are hiding it, and it concerns this miserable man! Don’t think to frighten me! Tell me the truth! Has he broken a limb?’

‘Well, yes.’

‘Seriously?’

‘Very seriously.’

‘Oh! And does his wife know? Is he at home?’

‘I can’t answer either question. I only know he is so bad that to think of what I said to-day makes me miserable, that it would make the worst of us forgiving, and it sets us thinking how any minute we may be called for with all our sins on our heads.’

Una’s eyes grew big with fear and pain, her lips compressed as though nerving herself to bear an inevitable stroke of pain without uttering a cry.

‘He is dead!’ she exclaimed.

The Captain did not contradict this assertion, and she put no further questions for awhile; but her face blanched, and a shudder went through her frame.

Jessie’s words that very morning (‘Papa came to see us last night. We are all friends now, and I think I feel happier’) rushed to her memory to make her heart sink and palpitate. Too shocked just then to ask what had happened, she could only sit silent and dazed.

The Captain took her cold hands within his own tenderly, and said, as if in apology:

‘I couldn’t help telling you, could I? You’d have heard it sooner or later; it had to be told. But it has frightened you, my girl!’

‘Yes, it has. I never thought of death.’

Then she asked for particulars, and he told her only what he thought necessary, sparing revolting details.

Presently she got up from her chair and walked away from him to her writing-table, to stand and gaze stupidly upon her papers scattered there and see nothing for obscured vision. Her uncle likewise rose and followed her. He knew that she was crying, and, too much moved to speak, he simply drew her to his broad bosom, that her head might lie there and be tenderly patted. After this pause, filled in with silent tears, it was characteristic of Una to control herself and stop her weeping.

‘Uncle,’ she said, ‘we must not waste time. I must go to Mrs. Lockstud at once—that is, as soon as you can find out for me how much or how little she knows. Mrs. Calliport is not here, and there is no close friend but me. She must know, also, sooner or later, and Jessie——’ She stopped abruptly here, and clasped her hands closely at her breast as one who sees an impending peril to a fellow-creature without having the power of averting it. She struggled for composure, and spoke again: ‘Uncle, Jessie must not know just yet. It will kill her—it surely will kill her!’

‘Unfortunately the papers will have it to-morrow—perhaps to-night,’ he said.

‘Oh, she must not know it!—must not hear it! What shall I do?’ she cried, filled with alarm for Jessie, and still clasping her hands, which action in itself was a prayer for help to devise some plan which might shield her girlfriend from the shock. And then, as if her prayer were answered, her face brightened, and a new idea was borne to her. ‘I have it!’ she said—‘I have it! I know Mrs. Brown, the proprietress of the sanatorium where Mrs. Calliport and Jessie are staying. I will send a wire to Mrs. Brown. It is the only thing I can do.’

Owing to this decision on the part of Una, the following despatch was received at the Wondoo sanatorium, addressed to ‘Mrs. Brown, proprietress,’ and signed ‘Una Pennacove’ :

‘Mr. Lockstud, the father of young lady now with you, has met with fatal accident. Oblige by breaking tidings gently to his aunt, Mrs. Calliport, and keeping them and all papers alluding to death out of Miss Lockstud’s way, in consideration of her present delicate health.’

A reply came the next day, but not from Mrs. Brown :



‘Know terrible truth. Jessie knows nothing. Come up. I must go to Priscilla. Not fit to stay here. I can’t hide my misery. Come.’

Una was not slow to obey as soon as she possibly could. Having broken the news and given what comfort she could to the widow, she hastened to the daughter. And thus the scenes all swiftly shift.

Una was at Wondoo, Mrs. Calliport at Cecil-lambda, and Roland on the ocean bound for Phillipia.

Mrs. Calliport left Jessie under the impression that the country air was too strong for her, and looked so haggard that Jessie had no difficulty in believing this. The shock conveyed in the news which Mrs. Brown undertook to break away from Jessie’s hearing, and let fall as lightly as her tact could prompt, yet fell heavily enough.

Aunt Jessie, with a heart that seemed crushed and with the dead weight of misery at her breast, held aloof from her niece that night on the plea of a bad attack of asthma, in which she desired to be left alone. Two days after the death, consigning her niece to Una’s care, she parted from her in an agony of pain to meet Priscilla later in the day, and feel as if

she had grown ten years older since she had bidden her good bye but a short time ago.

Her complaint was aggravated, her limbs shook, her voice was weakened, but her will was strong, and her sympathy and help powerful. So she went to her luckless nephew's widow—poor, broken-hearted, dazed little widow, from whom the full truth had been in mercy concealed. She knew her husband was killed on the railway. It was enough. She had not been allowed to see him, in spite of urgent entreaty, and Jack had hidden or destroyed any paper touching upon the death. The frightened children gathered around her, but could not deeply mourn with her, while she wept and moaned and extolled her husband, thinking of his last good-bye and his repentance.

The first great anguish had passed when Aunt Jessie embraced her ; she was able to sob out in her arms :

‘Oh, Aunt Jessie! he was sorry—so sorry! God was merciful, and took him when his repentant tears were scarcely dried, when his heart was soft, and all his intentions good. Something must have told him he was going to die—he was so kind, so good, so affectionate at the last.’

But widowhood was not to be Priscilla's

greatest trouble : another followed with no stealthy creeping step to tread upon the other's heel.

There were rumours floating in the city, and who shall say how they arise when a man's financial reputation is at stake or his credit questionable ? Rumours of mortgage and loan and bank-account overdrawn, which, quickening the ears of tradesmen concerned, showered on the widow, in the second week only of mourning, a downpour of duns, falling like burning drops of brimstone, and which, in her utter helplessness to combat or to meet, crushed her with shame and distress worse than the pain of her husband's death ; for that had its silver lining, with the memory of his remorse and appeal for her pardon and prayers. Here cold, black ruin was stalking mercilessly to wind about and wound her in its meshes. But for timely help, she might have succumbed. She was incapable of acting, and could only be led by firmer minds in the first torrent of her misery and desolation. The firmer minds belonged to Mrs. Calliport and Roland. Cecillambda was done for Priscilla. The governess and servants were dismissed ; jewels, plate, and the many costly articles appertaining to the average home of a gentleman

of means were left intact, to fall ultimately, with the house, to the hammer. She readily gave up all, crying afresh to think that with the sacrifice creditors were still wronged. She, and her children—including Louisa, now taken from school, and excepting Roland, Jack and Jessie—were transplanted to the only asylum ready to land them from the wreck—Mrs. Calliport's home. It was large and commodious, and, saving for the novelty of having a house filled with young people, the move did not cause Mrs. Calliport much uneasiness. What would have become of them but for Aunt Jessie, it is difficult to imagine; but we need not trouble to imagine, because she was there, and being there, was determined to befriend.

Una in the meanwhile was with Jessie, guarding her carefully from a premature knowledge of the calamity, in the hope that she would soon be strong again and better able to bear it. She set aside her studies, that all her time might be devoted to the invalid, and was always ready to cheer her with loving words and tender counsel, feeling some reward in detecting a faint indication of an easier mind in the brightening of the eye and the contented smile.

Roland had written once to her since his return to Phillipia, but Jessie was kept in ignorance of that return; for, being totally unexpected, she would naturally ask a series of questions to lead to an explanation. And though, as a rule, Una read out his letters unreservedly to Jessie, there was much in this one which she was compelled to skip, and upon this skipping a little matter hung which was to have some significance for Una.

The letter was a great relief to her, but she could not share that relief with Jessie. It had not the ring of dejection which she had anticipated.

‘Jack and I,’ he wrote, ‘are the guests of your good uncle at present. He wearies at your absence, and seeks us because he is tired of his own company, he says; not that either of us can take your place, I say. I am back in Phillipia, and feel I cannot leave it now that those I love so dearly are in such misery. though, for all the good I can do—I, who ought to be the mainstay of the family—it would be just as well to remain at Micola. But your uncle is indeed a friend in need to Jack and me—such a friend that he ought not to be thwarted in his generous desire, though it does seem that the meeting of it places me in a

most peculiar position. I am to fish in the stream where I have been poaching, and from which I fled on the discovery that it was poaching. By a lucky coincidence, the gentleman to whom your uncle has entrusted the management of the Goldwin estate of late years finds that he can better himself elsewhere, and leaves a vacancy in the office, which I am appointed to fill until the estate is wound up. An extra clerk being necessary, Jack has been advised, also by your uncle, to give up the Bank and enter the Goldwin offices ; and as his remuneration will be higher, he was willing enough to close with the offer.

‘I told you that Washington Larry had forced me to promise the acceptance of a loan from him, because of my announced intention of adopting the law as a profession. I thought it my only chance. Circumstances alter cases, and the loan will not be solicited just yet ; for here I can begin at once earning money, and that without exciting the least suspicion that I am other than Roland Goldwin, managing his own estate. The one great drawback is that the millionaire must pose as the miser, for I have vowed to let my salary accumulate, and so go towards furthering my aim of repayment. To do this, only sufficient funds will be drawn to

meet bare necessities. Of this resolve I have not told your uncle, but it is the only salve to my conscience.'

He wrote of much more ; of the calamity that had befallen the family, of Mrs. Calliport's generosity and affection, of the family's debt to her, of his own undying gratitude ; and there was certainly a large portion to be concealed from Jessie.

But Una received a second letter that morning from the Captain himself, which accounted for the coincidence of the exit of the now ex-manager of the Goldwin estate. There is no need to give it *in toto*, but for the benefit of the reader we will extract a paragraph :

'I've got hold of the boy now, and won't let him go. After beating at my brains for a scheme, one has turned up. M——, our manager, is going off. He wanted a bigger screw. He's worth it, and should have it, only I want him to go. He said he had the offer of a more lucrative appointment, but would prefer to remain where he was, if made worth while. I advised him by all means to take the better appointment, and he has gone, and Rol is at the rudder in his stead ; and the rise refused to him shall be the boy's. He is only a boy, and knows nothing



of business. Confound him! he's as slippery as an eel, and it's the only way I could get him in tow—a real tow; for I shall have to be at the office again, I know, to lead him on the sly. I shall miss M——, and have to get into harness again for awhile; but that's no odds, and mum is the word.'

Una's eyes sparkled ever so slightly, and her face flushed. The ruse which offered an anchorage to 'the boy' pleased her, though it meant for her uncle the work from which advancing years had suggested retirement.

'But,' she thought, 'uncle will not have the leading for long. There is that in Rol which will perfect him in anything he undertakes.'

How could she help being pleased or showing her pleasure? Jessie noted it—noted the skipping through Roland's letter, but only sighed quietly, and said nothing.

It was while Una was thus picking her way carefully through its pages, that Roland, remembering the packet entrusted to his keeping by Washington Larry, betook himself to John Tackerline's chambers—John Tackerline, the same who had drawn Jerry Goldwin's last will, but looking more than twenty-one years older, with his iron-gray, mutton-chop whiskers and bald head, with crow's feet at the temples, and



corrugated brow, but bodily and intellectually vigorous still, and with a strong but short sight behind his gold-rimmed glasses. He had conceived a strong attachment for the honest lad, who had leaped in his terror of dishonour from a pinnacle of wealth to alight in a bramble-bush, and take the sting of it with a smile. He received him in surprise, not knowing of his return, and greeted him with a loud heartiness.

Though he knew of the link between him and the late Theodore Lockstud, he could scarcely show sorrow or sympathy in this case, or even adopt a becoming melancholy, as he held out his hand in welcome. He was surrounded by busy clerks at that moment; but when Roland requested a private interview, he made a sign for him to follow him, and led the way to his own office, where Roland had so often drawn his unlimited allowance.

Unconsciously he drew a deep breath at the recollection. Not a word was said by either in reference to the death.

The lawyer, nursing his right leg over his left, and pulling at a whisker, peered through his glasses at his quondam ward, and said kindly :

‘ Well, my lad, what is it? How can I serve you?’

‘I want your advice upon a very knotty point.’

‘Yes.’

‘Jeremiah Goldwin left his will with you.’

‘Exactly.’

‘But he wrote something besides the will, which he gave over to Mr. Washington Larry.’

‘Oh! Go on.’

‘He addressed it to me — I mean, he addressed it to his son, Roland Kovodel Goldwin — to be opened and read by him when he should be about two months over his majority. It is a thick packet, and he gave it into Larry’s hands within a week of his death, bidding him keep it, excepting in the event of threatened decease, in which case he was to deposit it with you. Larry, living, has had it in his possession all these years, until recently. Now it is in mine, because it worried him. He reasons that I, having taken the place of Roland Goldwin, ought to open and read it. His reasoning is principally based on a dream, which to me savours of the comic, and really is not worth mentioning or repeating. Suffice it to say that I received the packet to please him; that I promised to consult you about it to please him. He is such a friend to

me that I am anxious to please him in all things possible. Now, Roland Goldwin is dead, and can it be possible that another man's son has a right to open that packet? I have scruples about it.'

'Has Larry any idea what it contains?'

'Well, to a certain extent he has, for he hints at some secret—some crime, I fear—but thinks there might be more of which he knows nothing.'

The lawyer, caressing a whisker, pondered for a second, and then said :

'Larry may be wrong, he may be right. It is not at all improbable that the communication may be a sort of codicil—not legally binding, of course—but one submitted to the judgment of the heir, and depending on his good feeling or otherwise towards a certain person, whose conduct led to the peculiar restrictions of his—Jeremiah Goldwin's—will. I allude to his unhappy widow, who was perhaps treated with undue severity by him, and for whom I must entertain some pity after all, whatever others think. Having bound her to a single life or comparative poverty, perhaps it may have been his intention to remove all restraint on the attainment of his son's majority, that being the period for the harshness of the sen-

tence to be mitigated, and she being not by any means an old woman.'

Roland had never viewed the packet in connection with Mrs. Goldwin at all, but now it struck him that the lawyer might be correct in his surmise; yet not that his view of the matter warranted the reading of the private papers of Jeremiah Goldwin.

'Allowing that, and what then,' he asked, 'if she can gain nothing by the written wish, since she has forfeited all claims on the estate?'

'The heirs—who, with me, are pledged, and have been willing to let her escape justice, to condone a crime for *your* sake—perhaps will be desirous to respect the wishes of the testator—who, in a great measure, drove her to a desperate remedy to protect her own interests—and may be also willing now to shirk legalities for *his* sake. And, again, he may wish him—the son—to do many things with regard to certain properties, and appeals to him through his affection, and not the prosy law, so deferring the disclosure of his plans as well as of his past until years of discretion might render that son capable of conceiving the full object of his father's wishes.'

'Then you *do* advise the opening and reading of the contents of the packet?'

‘Yes, I do; and if it will soothe your conscience, bring it round here, and you can open it in my presence—put the sin on me.’

‘I would like to tell the Captain of it first, and also that Larry should know of your decision.’

‘So; very good. I think old Larry is right. Depend upon it, my boy, Jerry asks for something to be done.’

‘That is what Larry himself thought. I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Tackerline. You will soothe my conscience.’

‘Tut! When you are ready, here am I, in my den with closed doors, and within walls that have no ears.’

A wire sent to Larry that morning produce l a return before the day was done :

‘Coming down. Defer reading till I am with you.’

To delay the reading was more acceptable to Roland than otherwise, for he had no fancy for prying into Jerry Goldwin’s past, and raking up what might be unseemly. He was as little anxious to read his last writing as Lockstud had been about the little book in his aunt’s davenport, and yet—blind mortals!—in each there lay the germ of an unlooked-for happiness.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE BLEEDING HEART.

MRS. BROWN'S sanatorium was a large weather-board cottage, with wings stretching on each side, and rooms grafted on at the rear. It was like an old tree putting forth fresh shoots, and in full blossom at this season.

There were many visitors at this time of year, and the sanatorium was always well patronized.

Una and Jessie occupied apartments in one of the wings. We find them now in a little parlour—not elegantly furnished, but of that primness and lack of graceful ease peculiar as a rule to rooms on hire.

It had a faded square of Kidderminster, and a hard horsehair suite consisting of couch, arm-chair, and six straight-backed chairs, all pinafores with the old-fashioned dead-white cotton antimacassars, tied with cheap ribbons. Also

an ancient piano, of fair repute in days past—being a Collard—now yellow-keyed, and of that tone described as ‘tinny,’ and with plaited silk facings, likewise draped with a crochet antimacassar falling like a bridal veil. There were a few oleographs on the flock-papered walls, and a fireplace with its cold iron bars, unattractive, hidden behind a fall of coloured tissue paper, cut into network, and decorated with impossible-looking roses. There was a square maple-framed mirror on the mantles shelf, with a clock that, like the piano, still bore the impress of better days, though enfeebled with age, with one hand gone, and a marble casing; this was flanked right and left with a cheap china vase.

In the centre of the room there was a round table, where the young ladies had their meals privately, but at present covered with a red table-cloth, and dotted with books and a couple of tiny jars holding fresh-cut flowers, with Una’s desk opened and spread with paper and blotting-pad.

Opposite the fireplace was the one window of the room, curtained with cretonne hangings, now well pulled back that the air might freely play into the room, and that the occupants might, if they pleased, have full view of a rustic

garden, with a scattering of fruit-trees, and beds of flowers of divers colours and species- the whole enclosed with a fence, completely covered with a hedge of vines and blackberries, which shut out the street or roadway.

Beyond the road there stretched a wide expanse of green country and distant hills, misty with heat, and of the hue once popularly known as elephant's breath, in reality the breath of summer.

They could also see a row of gabled cottages, straggling homesteads, and a church with its spire blinking under the morning sunshine as it pointed straight to a cloud-flecked sky.

Out on the road three or four chubby, bare-footed, brown-legged children were busily engaged in the manipulation of earth-pies; their chatter and merriment floated through the window, their hands were wrist-deep in mud, and stained with blackberry juice, the result of depredations on the hedge. Saving for the little stir in the air they made, the rumbling by of a cart fruit-laden, or the jog-trot of a Chinaman with his nimble, jerky, shuffling locomotion under his pole, bearing a basket at each end freighted with vegetables, there was no traffic at this particular hour of the day.



Jessie was reclining on the horse-hair couch, set by the window, her eyes wistfully gazing on the scene without, while Una sat near by at the table and over her desk. She had just finished reading aloud certain portions of Roland's last letter.

Any newspaper containing the least reference to Lockstud's death had been kept out of Jessie's reach and sight. This did not entail very much caution on Una's part, because Jessie was not over-eager to read for herself, but liked to be read to.

She was too tired to hold book or paper, and too listless to prospect over any paper for news likely to interest her. Una did the prospecting, and culled here and there from patches of clover—in type—that is, what she thought clover for Jessie's literary palate. Una humoured her in all things—humoured her in reading aloud part of this letter of Roland's, which was so full of the forbidden subject for Jessie's ears, that necessarily she had to be cautious and steer clear of the shoals it presented.

Jessie, as it has been before hinted, wondered that Una stopped short sometimes with a hurried, 'Oh, that won't interest you,' and so omitted several lines. She was more observant lately; but she made no remark, and

if her eyes were swimming at the conclusion, Una thought it was with the great trouble revived, for the mere mention of Roland's name always brought tears to this unhappy sister's eyes.

To-day the letter was about to be answered, and Jessie, for reasons of her own, had requested a second reading. Una had given it, but with exactly the same omissions, and with Jessie's eyes fixed upon her, Jessie's ears quickened and observation sharpened.

The second reading over, Una turned to write, and Jessie turned her face to the window.

This time her tears received some fresh impetus from a new tributary swelling the stream; but she made no moan, and tried to smile through the shower.

Una's pen flew swiftly over the paper. The children's voices were raised in discussion over the pie distribution; a baby civil war was imminent, and Middie, listening, smiled feebly, and wished she could be a little child again with only a child's woes. Next the church clock struck, and she counted eleven bell-like strokes, and lifted her eyes to the spire, which, like a prophetic finger for her, pointed to brighter realms. With an utter absence of

vitality, her soul went up in silent prayer for another life—a life of peace; a prayer breathed in a sigh, deep-drawn and audible enough to immediately rouse the writer from her work and smite her with compunction.

‘Mid’—Una in a second was at the couch, and kneeling by it on a hassock, with her arms about the sick girl—‘Mid, I am selfish to leave you to yourself so, when you can do nothing but think. I will defer my writing till you sleep, and read to you now. Shall I?’

Middie turned and caught Una’s face between her two slender brown hands.

‘You selfish!’ she cried—‘*you!* No, dear; *I* am selfish, I am wicked. Oh, Una, Una! life is so hard, and I pray to die—I want to die!’

‘Mid, this is wrong. You must not say so. You may be happy yet.’ Una took the little hands from her face and held them against her breast. ‘You are so young.’

‘Never happy here,’ answered Jessie. ‘Only perhaps a glimpse of happiness here and there, but so much misery between. One glimpse came to me when papa took me in his arms and kissed me so affectionately, just as your uncle would kiss you; when I felt that I could forgive him because he was so sincerely sorry—’

was not so hardened as I feared ; when his tears fell on my cheek and his hands caressed me and trembled so. I've heard you say sometimes that we all have a good and a bad angel by us ; it was the good angel, then, that looked out of his eyes that night, Una, and it made me happy. If God took him to-morrow, Una, I think He would forgive him much because he was so sorry.'

Una could not answer ; she could only look silently upward into Jessie's face, with fingers still fastened and pressing harder on the hands she held.

'I once thought,' continued Middie, 'that I could never, never forgive him. Isn't that dreadful and wicked?'

'You do forgive him now?' murmured Una, thinking the present hiding of his death was dreadful too, if not wicked.

'Oh yes, yes! And when I die he will come to my grave, and the good angel will look out of his eyes again, and I shall ask God to let it stay by him always—always.'

Oh, stop—stop, Mid! I can't bear to hear you talk of death as if you were an old woman instead of a bright girl.'

'Why?' Jessie looked affectionately into the upturned anxious face of her dear friend.

‘Why, when, if I try to be good, I shall be the happier for dying? Tell me, Una—you are good, and so clever too—do you think death terrible?’

‘No; decidedly not terrible. It is the one thing certain in this world. But it is terrible to prematurely desire it. It must come to us all sooner or later, and, God sending it, it must be a blessing, a wise ordinance, not a terrible one. If we believe in His goodness as we should, we must accept death as a mercy; but we should not court or invite it—especially not in our youth, dear, when there may be so much waiting for us on earth to do towards making others happy, when our love and our presence may be a comfort to those surrounding us, when we can go on doing good, perhaps, as the years grow, and better fit ourselves for death when it shall be sent to us. And you, Mid, are so dear, so very dear to us all.’

Jessie sighed again, and looked thoughtful.

‘You say that, just because you love me, not that I am useful in any way. But I want to be good, for I feel I shall be sent for soon. Do people become angels as soon as they die, I wonder? Do they have gauzy wings and smiling faces? And are they always happy? Oh, tell me, Una!’

In her firm reliance on her friend's profundity, she now searched her face as if she were a spirit of another world and could answer her fully and satisfactorily.

‘How can I answer you, Middie—I more than another?’ said Una, rising from her knees to sit on the edge of the couch and bend nearer to this eager questioner. ‘If we are called we should be ready; then the soul shall find wings and the angel shall be developed. How or in what shape, who can tell? The pictures given us are but of man’s conception, beautiful ethereal forms created by his ideality, with their wings and seraphic countenances and haloed heads. Not one can tell us how we shall appear, or of the mystery that follows the dissolution of soul and body.’

Jessie slightly knit her brows in an effort to think and discuss a question seldom forcibly presented to the mind until calamity befalls or bodily prostration gives the soul eager desire to soar to regions unknown. Death to the life-loving is mostly remote; health and happiness push the mere thought of it to the rear; it is a thing to be shut away, as it had been for Jessie in the days of her sunshine and gladness. Now she faced it as a friend, and longed to better understand its secret, its promised

sublimity. So, with a puckered brow, she asked :

‘ And yet why are there people who think it the end of all ? I have heard gentlemen talking to papa make so light of sacred things. I have sometimes believed them right, knowing them to be highly educated, and of course so much cleverer than I. One said death was “ total extinction.” It can’t be so, can it ? I shouldn’t like to die out soul and body altogether.’

‘ The gentleman who spoke so, Mid, was of those men who would take the bread from us and substitute stones—I mean, for the faith that nourishes the soul he would give us the sceptic’s windy creed.’

‘ They think, I suppose,’ said Jessie, wise in her simplicity, ‘ that, with all their learning, they must know all about it, and so think to force their superior knowledge on others. Perhaps they say to themselves, “ There can be nothing to know, else *we* should know all about it.” ’

‘ Perhaps they do. But it seems to me that the mystery following death is the great and sure sign of the wonderful hereafter. We walk blindly every day, not knowing what shall be even in the very next hour. God gives us memory ; He permits our minds to treasure up the records of a century, if we live so long.

We may revel in the past, it is all ours ; but the future is His. Science here is as powerless as a new-born baby ; it is baffled. And this ignorance of ours, this inability to pierce for light to be let in on what remains so dark, asserts our utter dependence on God's mercy and love, inspires that sweet trust which is called faith, the faith that whispers consolation in trial, that buoys us on the flood of misfortune, the childlike trust that shall carry us to eternal peace. This is all I can tell you, Middie. Have faith, and pray to live that you may lead a useful, happy life before you ask to die.'

Una's voice fell low and trembling at the last, and she bent closer still, letting her lips touch Jessie's forehead ; while Jessie, with her head now on Una's shoulder and her face turned to Una's, said :

' I have faith ; more now since you have spoken, more in myself too, because I don't feel so wicked as I did. I have been wicked—don't smile at me—wicked and foolish, but have prayed—oh, so hard!—to be better ; wicked about papa, and bitter, cross, and selfish.'

Una was about to refute this latter statement gently, when her mouth was covered for a moment with the uplifting of a hand.



· Don't speak yet, Una, please. Let me tell you everything. Yes, I *have* been selfish. You have read me the few letters you have received from Rol from Knutsford—read me tender messages to myself, and advice, and all his sayings and doings at Micola, and yet the reading has not given me pure pleasure. I have watched you reading, and somehow I see things now as I never saw them before. And this last letter brought a happy light into your eyes. Oh, I saw it! I saw it!—and know what it means. I judged you all wrong some few months ago, and now, judging right, I have been vexed, irritated with a new feeling—a vile feeling—that ought not to exist. Oh, Una, I have been jealous of *you*, envious, wicked, selfish! It tortured my wicked heart that you could think of him exactly as you pleased, while for me it was sin. I have read of men receiving a stab with the sword-blade up to the hilt in the flesh, which, when once drawn away, means bleeding to death. Well, that sort of blade seemed in my heart; but, praying hard to be good, I have drawn it away slowly and surely. The effort was great, but, dear, it is done—it is over; but the wound bleeds, yet without pain. I shall bleed to death, for I can't stop it. And if I die, what matter? For

now that I am good, God will have pity on me and take me.'

'Middie! Middie!' Una cried hysterically, as she fairly embraced the girl as dear to her as any sister could be, and for whose pain her own heart was bleeding.

Jessie did not cry; her pretty, soft brown eyes, sunken as they were, rested with trust and love on Una's face; but they were dry, and a smile played about her mouth, for her confession had lightened her burden, and she was already experiencing the beginning of a peace that was to be the end. Una was silent, and Jessie, after a pause, went on:

'You never gave me your full confidence. I once thought you had none to give, but was misled. You were so brave. I thought you wedded to your books just because you said you were, and I know you said it for my sake; you can't deny it—you are too truthful. You can't deny it—not to me, dear—not to the dying. I shall not breathe it to a soul. Tell me, do I see clear?'

Here a hand went up again to rest lovingly on Una's neck. Una's face was hidden, her cheek pressed one of Jessie's, but as yet she could not speak.

'Ah, dear, you *can't* deny it, I know it,'

Jessie whispered softly. 'Answer me outright now. Charlie Mountfu loves you. Has he told you so?'

'Yes'—very lowly.

'And you refused him, though you like him?'

'Yes.'

'Not because you are wedded to your books, but because you love elsewhere. You love dear old Rol, and oh, Una, look up! Remember, the blade is out of my heart now. I am a good girl, really, and, knowing that you love each other, I shall die happy.'

Una could not look up just then.

'Well, don't speak; your silence answers me,' said Jessie. 'Rol never loved me as he loves you, or as I loved him. See how I get at the truth. If he had loved me more than as a sister, his heart would have been broken too. He would have found no pleasure in Knutsford, or in writing to you as he has done. Thank God, he has been spared the agony that was mine! He will be happy again. And he has said things in that last letter to you which you would not read to save me pain. He has perhaps declared his love. See, Una, how clever I am!'

Una raised her head at last, and her face was so full of alarm that Jessie said quickly :

‘Don’t look so. What have I said to frighten you?’

‘That Jessie should have wormed out the truth from her in reference to her real sentiment for Roland was embarrassing, but that she should place such a construction on her omission of various passages in his letter was positively painful.

‘Mid, you are mistaken,’ she began, rising from the couch, and clasping her hands as if in appeal. ‘There is not one word of love in that letter. He does not know—does not think of love now.’

Jessie raised herself feebly, half sitting up, and she said seriously :

‘Because you blinded him as you did me. My eyes are wide open—very wide open now. You can’t blind me again. He must know some day what I know. He shall.’

Una went down on her knees for the second time ; she put her arms protectingly about the invalid, and said with pardonable emotion :

‘Don’t let us speak of this again, Mid. Rol does not think of love or marrying now. You wrong him. He is too full of your trouble and compassion for you. If you would make us both happy, get rid of this morbid fancy of coming death. You are so young—so precious to us all!’

Jessie, returning the caress, said :

‘I will try, Una ; but I can’t help it, because I’m always tired, perhaps. But what could it have been in the letter which you would not read to me ? All that interests you about him must interest me. Every line is a pleasure.’

‘I will tell you some day. It was partly business matters, which would only worry you ; and you must not be worried, if I can help it.’

‘About his own affairs ? Poor fellow ! But tell him, Una, money can’t buy a noble mind or a true heart, and that he is rich. You know how to put it. I can’t find words ; I am not clever. And, Una, why hasn’t mamma written to me yet ? I’ve not had a line even from Aunt Jessie. Do you think she can be ill and they won’t tell me ? It makes me anxious, you know.’

‘I will write and ask,’ said Una, quick to pacify her.

‘How good you are to me !’ said Jessie. ‘What should I do without you ? I’d hate to have a stranger about me. Now, Una, I really believe I could sleep. I feel easier ; and you go on writing your letter.’

‘If you feel like sleeping, I will.’

Jessie closed her eyes at once and lay back on her cushion to endorse the statement of her

sleepiness ; and Una, looking on, thought she appeared sweet and ethereal enough to represent the man-conceived angel, but with wings folded and unseen.

She went back to her desk and sat there, not writing, but with a host of thoughts crowding in her brain, and a whirl of emotion at her heart. Jessie's pathetic longing for death, and the perception that had penetrated deception, startled and alarmed her. With an elbow resting on the desk, and a cheek pressed against an open palm, supporting her head, slightly tilted, she sat lost in reflection. It was quite true that Roland had not written one word of love, and she knew him well enough to be sure that, having once given him to understand she could not feel for him more than a sister's affection, he would abide by what she had said, and never appeal a second time, guided by the conviction that she must know her own mind, and could not say one thing while meaning another.

‘And if I had not told him to go to Jessie that afternoon,’ she mused, ‘and give her his love, we might have been betrothed—he and I. She would have pined less then than now, and no disclosure would have arisen to shatter his position, and to wreak vengeance

on a guilty woman. Crime would have thrived exultant, and the innocent would be spared the knowledge of years of theft. I unwittingly sowed the seed from which the bramble has sprung so rapidly to do its work. But for me, Mrs. Dripper would have held her tongue ; but for me, Rol would still be a millionaire. Was it my will, or an impelled obedience to some higher law, which gave me strength to suffer for what I considered the right, and so forge the chain to drag down the evil and exalt the good ?'

'Have you finished, Una ?'

Jessie had dozed scarcely ten minutes, and opened her eyes to see Una in that attitude of meditation and staring vacantly at her. Una awoke from her reverie.

'I have not begun yet. You have scarcely slept at all.'

'Haven't I ? I thought it was near lunch-time. But never mind me ; go on and write, and please ask Rol something for me—will you ?'

'Yes, of course I will. What is it ?'

'Well, ask him, if I send for him ever, wishing badly to see him, you know, whether he will come as fast as steam can bring him.'

'I will,' replied Una, trying to speak lightly ;

‘and I will tell him you are trying to be happy, and we shall soon have our merry Mid back again.’

‘I shall be happy. I am happy now—tell him that; but I shall be happier when I may see him again, if only just once.’

‘You shall see him many times, dear, and be rid of your present ideas,’ predicted Una.

To this Jessie said nothing, but closed her eyes for the second time, implying she wished for another doze. Seeing this, Una at last set to work and wrote rapidly.

‘Let me tell poor Middie,’ she said to Roland, ‘that you have returned to Phillipia on business. It will be the truth; and the fact of knowing you are so near—while this presentiment of early death so haunts her—will relieve her mind and add to her happiness. I am in daily dread of her father’s death being known to her, for at present she is as little able to bear the shock as ever. She is very weak, and this accounts for the morbid fancy of which I have written, and I certainly think she needs a doctor. Can’t you reason with Aunt Jessie about this and overcome her opposition? Actually Dr. Blatt is recruiting his health here and taking a holiday; but I believe he would make a concession in Jessie’s favour, if I ask



him. You know he is clever. I am so anxious about her. Do try and win Aunt Jessie's consent.'

Here Una, with a few dashes of her pen, all unconsciously helped to forge another link in the chain of coming events.

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE HANGING SWORD GIVES WAY BEFORE  
FRANK LANNAGER.

ROLAND, having received and read this last letter of Una's, was sorely troubled. Seeking an opportunity as soon as possible to speak of it to Mrs. Calliport without adding to Mrs. Lockstud's present misery, he took care to have a private interview.

'There it is,' he said, as he folded the letter carefully and slipped it back in his breast-pocket, after having acquainted her with the gist of its contents. 'Mid is not getting stronger for the Wondoo atmosphere. It is time for a doctor to be called.'

'To torment her with questions,' argued Aunt Jessie.

'Much can be told him that need not implicate the family, and much that, as a gentleman, he may be trusted with. Dr. Blatt is a gentleman,' reasoned Roland.

‘Una is too indulgent, too sympathetic, too nervous, I fear, to have the care of a girl who only needs rousing by a little wholesome firmness. You can’t expect her to be benefited all in a hurry. We all think we are going to die when we can’t get strong quickly, and Jessie thinks so, and is allowed to brood, perhaps. If it were not for her mother needing me as she does, I would go to Wondoo again and send Una back to her uncle. She never talked about dying to me. Her heart is well-nigh broken, and her body gives way in natural sympathy, but it is not so frail as to give way altogether.’

Aunt Jessie’s eyes had a certain fear in them, for all her expressed incredulity about her niece’s serious condition, and her fingers began to dovetail nervously on her lap.

‘For all that, I really think a doctor should see her.’

‘To saturate her with noxious physic,’ Aunt Jessie replied with an obstinate humour peculiar to her when she felt her stand weakest. ‘She will get better without one, if Una gives her regularly the homeopathic doses I instructed her to give. She will tide over it.’

‘And if she should not,’ urged Roland, with tears unshed and glistening—‘if she should not, how shall we comfort ourselves, or how

shall we reproach ourselves for not seeking that which offers the chance of reliable help? I can't understand your opposition, when in all other things you are so just and so reasonable.'

'My opposition is based upon reason, my prejudice against the whole fraternity. In desperate cases the patient more often than not has to bear the brunt of the doctors' experiments, and they end the attack with a hit or a miss. In surgery I give them best, but unfortunately they can't heal a broken heart, a mental affliction, and our Jessie is suffering so. She wants time; nature and the simple remedies of my own will be her best physic. You and Una are impatient and imprudent.'

Mrs. Calliport's breath came thicker and faster. She would not admit that Jessie might be worse, yet she was as troubled as Roland himself.

'Then,' said Roland, 'in this matter, you must pardon me if I take the responsibility of the "hit or miss" on my own shoulders, and write to Una to secure Dr. Blatt's services.'

Mrs. Calliport sat up straight in her arm-chair and spoke severely:

'You are wrong; fifty doctors will do her no good. Do you suppose for a moment that I

should not have called in a dozen, if I thought one out of the lot could restore her to what she once was? She will get better; and if she should not it will not be for lack of the doctor. Theo also said she must have a doctor, and I would not yield.'

'Yield to me, aunt,' Roland pleaded. 'We owe you so much; you have been our good angel; it hurts me to do one thing without your sanction. Consent to this proposal of mine, and let Dr. Blatt be called.'

He took one of her hands and gallantly, nay, affectionately, pressed it to his lips. Mrs. Calliport was mollified.

'I don't believe,' she began, with wheezing breath and a catch in her voice—'I won't believe the dear child can be getting worse, and yet if anything happens to her it will break my heart, too!' And here, fairly overcome, she gave way to a flood of tears, and added brokenly: 'Have your way, have your way.'

Roland kissed her hand again in silence. He loved and venerated the old lady, of whom he spoke to Una as the 'dear fairy godmother of the Lockstud family,' and to act contrary to her wishes, as he would have to do had she not conceded, would have savoured of ingratitude. Recovering herself, she detained

him as he rose to leave her and hurry to write to Una of his success. 'Stay, my dear ; don't go yet, now you have got all you came for. I want to talk to you of something else while we are quite alone. I want to tell you something that may comfort you—give you a grain of comfort, perhaps.' She hesitated, looked fondly at him, and then mysteriously added : 'The name you are compelled to retain is not entirely false.'

'I don't understand,' Roland said, looking puzzled.

'No ; how should you ? You will directly, though. I've been wanting to tell you this ever so long, but never got the chance, for I don't wish Priscilla to know of it. The child who died and was buried as Cecil Lockstud was'—she let her voice fall to a whisper—'Roland Kovodel Goldwin.'

'Yes ; well ?'

'Well, when I heard his second name was Kovodel, it startled me rather, for it is not a common name. Now, strange to say, you are neither a Lockstud nor Goldwin, but you *are* a Kovodel.'

Roland, of course, had to rise and walk up and down the room, for this sudden communication at once agitated him.

‘You surprise me!’ he said.

‘Naturally. But it is true. Theo’s mother was a Mrs. Kovodel. Circumstances compelled her to adopt the name of Lockstud. Now do you understand? You are in reality Cecil Kovodel.’

‘Remarkable!’ ejaculated Roland, now standing still, with his arms across his chest and his eyes on his aunt. ‘Tell me why. Was there a family dishonour, then?’

‘Don’t be impatient: you shall read for yourself.’

‘Read?’

‘Yes, read. There is a little book in my davenport which will explain everything. The night before poor Theo died I told him of this book, because I was going on a journey, it seemed to me, and, being an old woman, did not know how it might affect me. I remember distinctly saying to him, “Who knows what a day may bring forth?” never thinking of any fatality for him, and I meant him to read it after my death. Well, you see, he never read it, and died in ignorance of his true name, and I only speak of it now to you in sacred confidence, because I know how sensitive you are about retaining a false one. You are really entitled to the one of Kovodel, and it may be soothing to you.’

‘It is. I shall respect your confidence,’ Roland replied gratefully, ‘and I am anxious to read the book.’

‘You shall read it and then burn it,’ said Aunt Jessie; ‘for it can be of no further use, and the truth need never be known. Do you see the coincidence? Theo never knew his real name, yet by his own act he unconsciously forced his son to bear it.’

‘It is remarkable!’ repeated Roland; ‘and a most striking coincidence.’

So Roland went back to Unaville with a little book in his hand—a manuscript book, old, wrinkled, and faded in leaf and binding, and filled with a woman’s angular writing.

There was another coincidence of which he had not spoken to Mrs. Calliport. It was that he should be made the depositary of two distinct disclosures touching the dead, who were as naught to him, and whom he had never seen, and who, being respectively the old man Jerry Goldwin and the parents of Theodore Lockstud, could not possibly have anything in common with each other.

He was prepared to read of some family backsliding hidden beneath an assumed name. It struck him then that a taint had perhaps



run in the blood, and communicated itself to the father, whose memory he could not cherish.

It was his own grandmother's diary he held, and so eager was he to know why he was a Kovodel that he read it through that same night before he went to sleep. He read it from beginning to end, and handled the book reverently as something sanctified—so sanctified that he would not burn it, but put it carefully away in his desk side by side with the packet received from Larry.

Owing to the perusal he could not frame a letter to Una that night, and therefore wired the next morning to send at once for Dr. Blatt.

On receipt of the telegram Una, thinking it best to see the doctor herself first, and personally request his attendance, hurried to the private cottage secured for a temporary residence by him, and made a fateful move.

For the first time since her misfortune Jessie was left alone. Pillowed and shawled she lay on the hard horsehair sofa, staring through the window and up at the sky, at the church and the mountains beyond, with a far-off, melancholy gaze. Una had put into her hand an interesting periodical, illustrated, but she was

evidently not attracted by it, for it had fallen on the floor unheeded.

How could she read? She knew why Una was away, because she had told her it was the wish of all at home that Dr. Blatt might be asked to prescribe for her, since she was not getting better quickly enough to please them.

But here Una had perforce resorted to but half a truth, fearing her charge was decidedly getting worse, for all indications of getting better were painfully remote.

Never attempting to oppose the wishes of her family, Jessie submitted to receiving Dr. Blatt, but the idea of talking to him of her ailments was repulsive. Moreover, like Mrs. Calliport, she had no faith in his medicines restoring health to her; and now a sense of loneliness crept about her like a cloud, and blinding tears shut out mountain and church.

Listless and so weary, she sank back amongst her cushions, longing for Una's return. Had she continued looking through the window, she would have seen a familiar figure at the sanatorium gates, about to enter.

Presently Mrs. Brown peeped in at the door, creaking it on its hinges. Jessie looked

towards it quickly. It was a relief to see somebody, and the comely buxom proprietress was pleasant to look upon in her clean cotton dress and smart morning cap, her crinkly bands of hair tucked partly beneath, and her clear complexion with the polish of a china doll.

She entered softly, and went up to the sofa.

‘I thought you might be asleep, miss,’ she began. ‘Did I disturb you?’

‘Not at all, Mrs. Brown.’

‘Your friend, Miss Pennacove, asked me to step in to you sometimes while she was gone, to see if you required anything, or were lonely at all. But you won’t be lonely now, for there’s a gentleman come to see you.’

Here one of Mrs. Brown’s eyes went through an attempt at a wink, meant to imply that she understood the young lady was about to receive a visitor in whom she must take more than an ordinary interest.

Jessie, unheeding the lid contortion, and full of nervous dread at seeing a stranger, cried out :

‘Is it the doctor so soon, and Una not here?’

‘Dear me, no, Miss Lockstud ; it is a *young* man.’

'Who is it?' asked Jessie querulously.

'Why, to be sure, now, here's his card in my pocket all the time. Shall I show him in?'

Jessie took the card gingerly and to her dismay read, '*Mr. Frank Lannager, Junr.*' A flush dyed her face and brow, and just as suddenly receded again, as if it had made a mistake in painting the hollow white cheeks in painful mimicry of health, and so had hastily retreated.

'Oh, why had Una left her? She would be here but for that horrid doctor,' she told herself. 'Shall I refuse to see Mr. Lannager, when he has taken the trouble to call? That would be wrong and discourteous. How does he happen to be at Wondoo?'

Mrs. Brown, noting the flush and the tremor and the imminent destruction of the card within the thin shaking fingers, meaningly smiled, and never waited for Jessie's reply, but bustled off to Mr. Lannager, Junr., and was leading him to the little parlour before Jessie's mental debate had been decided for or against his reception.

So he entered and advanced to her, hat and stick in hand; and she, half shrinking, tried to look pleased, giving a faint smile which termi-

nated with that droop of the lip which heralds so often the cry of the child.

‘I am sorry to see you so unwell,’ he said, holding her hand. ‘My sisters are anxious about you.’

He was more than sorry—he was shocked—to see how much she had suffered. He was full of sympathy as he was of love for her, and had determined to visit Wondoo that he might see her and tell her so. His parents were not in the secret of this movement; his sisters were. With the former he had adopted subterfuge, saying he felt in need of a change, and that he would take a short ‘spell’ somewhere; but the latter knew where the ‘spell’ was centred. He had arrived the night previous, and now considered the Fates propitious, as he could meet Jessie alone.

‘I have not been well,’ she answered; ‘and it is kind of you to come and see me. Una will be here presently; sit down.’

Obedying, he drew a chair near to the sofa, and, setting his hat close by, he laid his cane across his knees, and began to remove his gloves. He was so thoroughly surprised and pained at her fragile appearance that for a time presence of mind deserted him, and he felt incapable of finding words, until she asked how

his sisters were, and gave him something to say.

‘They are quite well, thank you,’ he replied ‘I wish you were as well and strong. You have had a long bout, haven’t you?’

‘Yes,’ said Jessie. Then, anxious to glide from the subject of her illness, she asked: ‘When did you come to Wondoo?’

‘Last night. I felt seedy, too, and wanted a breath of country air.’

He began to work his cane nervously on his knees like a rolling-pin over the dough, and the apple in his throat made a slight spasmodic movement as if resisting an effort to swallow it. He was trying to hide his grief, but words meant to comfort her stuck at the root of his tongue somehow; and she, thinking he was really suffering, said:

‘You must be leading too sedentary a life at your desk.’

‘No, I don’t think it is altogether that; perhaps, like yourself, I may have mental sickness. Perhaps,’ he went on with another gulp at the apple, ‘your trouble may be mine. Indeed, it is your trouble that brings me here now to offer condolence, and to cheer you if you will allow me.’

His eyes watered, and he gazed at her

mournfully through the sympathetic mist, noting for the first time that she wore a maroon robe of some soft clinging material, with a fall of creamy lace from throat to hem, and at her wrists, but no sign of mourning anywhere. Yet he scarcely drew any inference from the observation, for he did not think it possible that she could be still in ignorance of her father's death, and the family monetary difficulties. His reference to her trouble made her heart seem to stand still, and filled her face with consternation.

'Surely,' she inwardly cried, 'he has not heard anything of this horrible secret of Rol's? What trouble can he mean?'

Misconstruing the agitation he saw, he went on quickly :

'Forgive me if I harass you ; but do hear me out. I have come to tell you that I love you—have loved you a long time, and must go on loving you through weal or woe.'

Jessie crouched and hid her face, crying out in her heart :

'Oh, Una ! Una ! Come home and stop this !'

'Oh, believe me, my dear Miss Lockstud !' he continued, blundering and blind, yet getting bolder after the first plunge, and striking out

for deeper water—dangerous depths into which Jessie was to be dragged with him, ‘I love you all the more for the affliction and the calamity which have come to you. My father is too fond of me to balk me in any desire, and he is fond of you, I think, knowing how dear you are to me. He will willingly take the place of your own poor father, so suddenly taken from you. Never mind the loss of wealth—the loss of dowry. I have enough for both. It will be all the greater joy to take you for yourself alone, that you may know I love you for your own sweet self. I am almost glad you have lost your dowry, that I may be able to save you from missing it, and be the friend you need if you will only let me.’ His words came freer with his earnestness, but he avoided looking at Jessie for fear of losing himself in nervousness, and kept his eyes on the faded Kidderminster, making imaginary figures there with the point of his cane. When at last he ventured to turn his head towards her again, it was to see her sitting upright, and with an aspect of threatened stupefaction, which made him exclaim: ‘Miss Lockstud—Jessie, what have I said? Nothing to alarm you, surely; I mean all I have said.’

‘What are you saying? I don’t know,’ she



cried, as she put a hand to her left side as if to still a pain. 'Are you mad, or am I?'

'Mad!' he echoed. 'Oh, only mad for love of you, Jessie.' He was so eager, so vehement in his suit, that he went down on his knees before her, and caught up the hand that lay idly on a cushion. 'I will be everything to you. You need not mourn your father so deeply. Your mother shall not be forgotten; she shall be solaced in her widowhood and poverty.'

Jessie pulled her hand from his, and cowered again with both hands covering her face, and a low wail of suppressed agony escaped her purpling lips.

'Go away—go away!' she gasped.

At that moment footsteps were heard in the hall that led to the little parlour, and Frank simultaneously rose from his knees in alarm and confusion as Una appeared at the door accompanied by an elderly gentleman, bland of countenance and tall of stature.

'Mr. Lannager!' said Una in surprise, and next, when she saw Jessie's attitude, 'what is the matter?'

'I don't know,' Frank answered, not knowing, indeed, but white with fear. 'We were speaking—I—I—was speaking to Miss Lockstud; that is all I can tell you.'

He spoke and looked like a culprit, and the elderly gentleman gravely addressed him :

‘The young lady needs my services, sir ; perhaps you had better leave her to me.’

Frank, now recognising Dr. Blatt, caught up his hat, and, bowing to Una as he passed her, hurriedly walked out of the room. But he had no intention of leaving the house until he could see the doctor, for whose departure he lingered, and whom, after a weary waiting, he waylaid at the sanatorium gate with :

‘Pardon me, may I have a word with you, Dr. Blatt?’

‘At your service,’ said Dr. Blatt. ‘You are Mr. Frank Lannager, are you not?’

‘Yes,’ answered Frank impatiently, as if his name were of no consequence whatever, and then with feverish haste : ‘Tell me, what ails Miss Lockstud? I—I am no idle questioner, but a friend of the family.’

Dr. Blatt replied interrogatively :

‘And a particular friend of the young lady, I presume?’

This was said with no undercurrent of badinage, but with an emphasis on the word ‘particular’ which conveyed his real meaning.

‘Dr. Blatt, I meet you to-day for the first time, but I have heard of you, and know you

to be a gentleman. When I confide to you that my happiness or misery must depend upon your answer to my question, you will understand that I have answered yours.'

The doctor stroked a silvery beard, and maintained silence for a few seconds, while he turned to walk up and down the footpath with Frank at his side and his phaeton waiting his pleasure at the curb.

The good doctor was perplexed, and scarcely could decide how much he might tell this young man. He had learned during his interview with Una Pennacove that Miss Lockstud was the victim of a mistaken passion for one whom she could not possibly marry; that the trouble of it had undermined her health; that her friends were anxious about her; that they wished him to see her, if he would make an exception in their favour and offer his services within the period he had prescribed for himself for rest from professional duties. Knowing the Lockstuds, he was willing to make an exception, and had received Miss Pennacove with the utmost courtesy, and, moreover, had ordered his phaeton at once to proceed to the sanatorium, and offered a seat therein to Una, who accepted it gratefully as the quicker way of returning to her charge. On the road she took

care to impress upon him that her friend was still in ignorance of her father's death and the ruin of his family's prospects, as she was not considered to be in a condition fit to combat with the tidings. When he saw the patient he was somewhat puzzled to account for the state of mind apparent, but not for long.

The girl's wail of anguish and rush of questions, as soon as Miss Pennacove bent over her, told him much. For a time she was unconscious of the doctor's presence, and he knew that by the advent of a young gentleman—Frank Lannager by name—there had arisen mischief irreparable; knew that he had unwittingly tipped his would-be Cupid's arrow with a quick poison; and now, with the sincere passion and misery working in his face, also knew that the poor girl was very dear to him. So the good doctor was really perplexed, walking slowly with his hand on his beard, benevolence at his heart, and a restless, impatient lover at his side waiting to be answered.

'She has had great trouble,' he said at length, slowly and deliberately, 'and it has affected the action of the heart. Under the constant strain of mental pain, the heart, being the most irritable and susceptible of organs, is bound to sympathize; and sometimes, where

there exists a natural weakness of that organ—though to be combated by attention to certain rules—it cannot contend against overwhelming shocks : such a shock as she has had, for instance, may lead to painful results.'

'Good heaven! do you mean—you can't mean——'

'I mean she is seriously ill; but it is just possible she may recover.'

Frank turned ghastly white, and his knees trembled.

'Oh, can't you tell me she *will* recover?' he asked wildly.

Dr. Blatt looked grave, and shook his head.

'My dear sir,' he said, 'doctors are not wizards; they are only the servants of science; or soldiers, perhaps, with Science for captain. They are ever on the march—on the alert to meet and defeat the physical ills to which humanity is heir. Yet the battle is not always to be won, and though our means of defence daily improve and gain strength, they are yet primitive, and we are unable to count upon success in attack upon every enemy. I will try my best.'

Frank was dumb, his head drooped, his arms hung loosely at his sides, and he looked the

embodiment of despair. Had he known that his loosened tongue had put forth a flame of its kind to sear the heart he had fondly hoped to win and soothe, the poisoned arrow would have been turned to his own bosom to give him escape from a never-dying remorse.

Dr. Blatt turned a pitying face on him, and said :

‘Call on me to-morrow, if you remain here, and I can report. But I forbid you calling again on the young lady.’

The doctor, adding a kindly ‘Good-morning,’ stepped to his phaeton, and Frank Lan-nager walked moodily away. Thus Una, in her zeal for Jessie, left her alone, and the sword, which she thought did not hang exactly over the beloved invalid’s head, fell with a fatal stroke.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### 'VENGEANCE IS MINE.

JESSIE did not succumb immediately to the drop of the dreaded sword. But, too weak for the exertion of removal to Phillipia, she was fain to remain at Wondoo, whither her mother and Aunt Jessie hurried on receipt of a few lines from Una, telling them what had happened, and imploring them to come.

To Roland this fresh misfortune was as the proverbial straw that overweighted the camel. So overcome was he that the Captain, thinking to comfort, made light of Dr. Blatt's diagnosis and vowed he was a 'croaker,' and that the girl, with youth in her favour, must recover. But Roland was not to be comforted.

He waited in an agony of fear for the summons that might come any day to call him to her side for a last farewell; but the interval was so fraught with desolation of spirit that he

looked himself a fit subject for the sick-bed. So much did he look it that the Captain forced a holiday upon him, insisting he should not do any office-work till he felt better. As a result his thoughts were never diverted from the one sad channel, and if not impelled to take exhausting walks, he roamed aimlessly about Unaville, unable to set his mind to anything. His appearance excited comment.

Friends of the days that seemed so far distant, and yet belonged to but a couple of months ago, met him during these rambles and wondered why a countenance normally sunshiny and genial was so grave—even austere—wondered why he chose to keep Goolgun shut up. Conjecture was busy, and said he was in trouble; for when it became known that Jessie Lockstud was so seriously ill, that small world in which her family had figured as social planets, knowing of his intimacy with the Lockstuds, and remembering rumours of a private engagement existing between him and Miss Lockstud, believed it had divined the full cause of his dejection—a belief that spared him trying questions often. Yet many were put to him relative to Mrs. Goldwin, who was supposed to have gone abroad, and who, of course, was always referred to as his mother.



Was she fully recovered? What sort of a trip did she have quick or slow or stormy? etc. How long would she be absent? To which he made safe replies: He had not yet heard; she was an indifferent correspondent.

Brooding over his misery, he found himself curiously eager to know where she had gone. She had dropped out of his life, but never from his memory—sore, keen memory—to which Jessie's illness acted now as a stimulant. What he prayed to forget was roughly, bitterly recalled. Indisposition for her of some kind had been expected to follow the cruel revelation of prolonged crime; wretchedness was bound to cloud her sweet young life, but it was fondly believed that youth would prevail against the sorrow, and time assuage. These might have availed but for that love-speech of Frank Lannager's centred in a bomb-shell. He could not blame him, for he had stumbled only as one with bandaged eyes, not knowing where he trod; he had behaved too nobly to be condemned, and all wrath and rancour were directed at the woman who had laid the foundation of the family misfortune. He had tried to smother hate and passion, but all that was human in him arose in revolt. Had her guilt touched him alone he could have borne it with patience and

fortitude ; but no, like an octopus, its stinging feelers gathered all those who were so dear to him in one agonizing embrace.

Moodily perambulating one morning within that week of intensified misery, walking in rather a busy street, a woman suddenly stood before him, barring his progress. Her mittened hands were clasped, her face uplifted. Lost in reverie, his eyes did not take in outward things, until her voice, so familiar, broke through his abstraction. He halted and saw his foster-mother.

‘Don’t you know me, Master Rol ? Would you pass me by ?’

‘I did not see you,’ he replied.

‘You do now ; you see me now. Won’t you shake hands ? Oh, can’t you forgive me yet ?’

She impulsively caught at his right hand, and he allowed her to hold it, though he said never a word about forgiveness ; her presence just then seemed to throw a lurid, stronger glare on retrospect.

‘Oh, you are changed,’ she went on, almost sobbing ; ‘and I have been praying to see you to tell you much that you should know. I think the good Lord has forgiven me, because He has heard my prayer. I didn’t know how to get at you. I knew you were back at

Phillipia, but I daren't show myself to them that might tell me all about you, if they would. But here you are dropped out of the skies, as it were, in answer to my prayers, and I have so much to tell you.'

'What more can you have to tell me?' he asked, going back to her confession of that terrible night—burned, etched in his mind. 'What more?'

'About myself—others!' she cried, forgetting in her excitement that she might attract attention of passers-by. 'I am trying hard to be good—to wipe out my sin. I have had my punishment, and it is all deserved, I know; and you will yet have your reward, Master Rol, and you will cheer my old heart just once by saying you forgive me.'

Unable yet to respond honestly to her appeal, he said calmly :

'If you have much to tell me, we had better find a more secluded spot. Let us step across to the statue there—Bonomea Place.'

Conscious of curious looks being thrown at them by foot-passengers ever passing, and of helping to block the path, he hastily drew his hand from hers, and, with an air of the deepest melancholy, silently turned and led the way to Bonomea Place—a green slice of

earth, not a quarter of an acre in area, and divided from the street by a tall railing, making a garden-like enclosure, with a flower-bed here and there, and a couple of garden benches ; while in the centre there towered a bronze statue, the first erected to the memory of a plain citizen in the Australian colonies, to immortalize one John Bonomea, one of Philipia's greatest and worthiest of men—a king amongst philanthropists, financiers ; a benefactor to those countries where his indomitable energy had found vent, and his benevolence and forethought wrought unlimited good for the working man.

Australia, never backward in recognising merit and bestowing the laurel, stamped one of her characteristics here ; and Roland, entering with Mrs. Dripper, stood on what was consecrated ground in the sight of a grateful people, ever ready to honour worth.

They seated themselves on one of the benches, from where they could see, had they chosen to look, commercial prosperity represented on either side in the many-storied buildings of shipping firms and wool-brokers ; shipping masts and spars peeping upward from the distant wharves, and a 'bus-stand immediately fronting the statue, where an omnibus stood

waiting its specified time to start, the driver on the box flicking the flies from the horses' ears with a lazy, light switch of the whip; while other vehicles, besides the 'people's carriage,' rattled, plying to and fro with a lumbering, busy din, and pedestrians hurried by on business intent.

‘Now you can talk,’ said Roland, turning to his companion. ‘What is it you have to tell?’

‘You have not answered me yet,’ Mrs. Dripper persisted. ‘You avoid answering me. I asked you to say you'd forgive me’—again she clasped her hands in entreaty—‘and you won't say it. Say it and mean it.’

‘I try to forgive you,’ he answered; ‘let that suffice for the present. You are right—I am changed from a boy to a bitter, hardened man. The old nature has gone with my right to the old name. I am miserable, and see nothing in the future but gloom.’

‘Don't talk like that, Master Rol; you have a bright life before you yet.’

‘I was not thinking of my own future especially. Do you know that our Jessie is ill—so ill, the doctor admits, that her life is but a question of days? Think of it all! Think of her afflicted mother! Think of the wrong that has sapped her life—will consume it!’

Mrs. Dripper's bosom heaved, and she pulled down the veil from her bonnet to fall over her face.

'It is too true,' he went on. 'And see how quickly it is to follow that other death! Surely you know of that?'

'Oh yes, yes — everything,' moaned his listener.

'And the insolvency and ruin?'

'Yes.'

'The additional misfortune we tried to hide from her, but in a moment, quite unforeseen, she learned everything from a stranger, and it is killing her! One consolation stands: she in her sweet innocence will be removed from the sting of shame, and find peace. It is God's mercy, perhaps. But for her widowed mother — for me——'

Roland could say no more for awhile, and averted his head. Mrs. Dripper was crying quietly behind her veil.

After pausing thus, he cleared his throat, and spoke again:

'You ask for pardon when my heart is full of distress—full of vengeance—for that woman who has besmirched you with her sin. See how changed I am—how desperately wicked in this sore temptation for revenge!'

He bowed his head despondently, and felt that all the philosophy and goodness for which Una had aggrandized him were seemingly being wrenched from his soul.

‘Hush! hush!’ said Mrs. Dropper solemnly. ‘It is about her I have so much to tell. You won’t feel so much revenge when you know. I’ve felt that way, and I know. You have suffered, but not so much as me, Master Rol, because you can’t feel that you deserve it, and I do deserve it. I have lost all my money, lost friends, and my daughter—my own child—can find no room for her old mother at her fireside in her old age—the child I was tempted to sin for. Her husband objects to the mother-in-law, I suppose, and so I stand alone like an old stump stripped of its branches. But you have done nothing but right, and have taught me to see the right. For your sake more than my own I have cursed her, and prayed for evil to overtake her, and now it *has* overtaken her, and I’ve seen her, and am sorry for her. Oh, she is punished—dreadfully punished!’

‘You have seen her—and where?’ asked Roland, with that frown on his face which might betray him as Theodore Lockstud’s son.

‘I left her only this morning at the Warrelda Asylum.’

‘There! Why there?’

‘For the best or the worst of reasons. Why do people get sent there, Master Rol?’

‘Good heaven!’ He started up from the bench. ‘Do you mean she—she is mad?’

‘Mad as a March hare! God help her!’

Roland, unprepared to hear of retribution of this kind, sat down again somewhat stunned. The frown fled, his chin drooped till it touched his chest, his hands grasped his knees, and a shudder shook his athletic frame.

‘Go on!’ he cried. ‘What more?’

‘Well, she came first to the Debella hospital, you see—came as Miss Gelden. She got into a gentleman’s house as governess or house-keeper, I’m not sure which. One morning I met her at the park, but I didn’t feel quite sure. It looked like her, and it didn’t. It was her figure I saw, and her face, only her hair and brows, being dyed, were deep black and not golden, and I went away worried over the likeness. But it was her, after all, and I knew it when, the morning after Mr. Lockstud’s funeral, she was brought to the hospital. She had taken laudanum, and the servants found her, as they thought, dead. The gentleman—her employer—was not at home, and the servants, in terror, ran off for the doctor. He said she was



not dead, she had blundered somehow, and with much trouble he brought her back to life, but helpless. The servants, it appears, didn't like her a little bit, and both objected to having her on their hands when she might die any day, so they flatly refused to have anything to do with her, and the doctor, as soon as he could, got her removed to the hospital, and that's how I met her again, still wondering who she was. I was soon to know, for I was appointed to nurse her through the night, and she was carried to one of the wards and laid upon a bed alive, and, as I thought, coming to her senses. But she never came to her senses, and she never knew me. The next morning—in the small hours—another nurse took my place while I slept, and she came and told me afterwards all about it. "Fancy," she said, "that poor Miss Gelden is quite out of her mind! We thought she was getting round, when she sat up and looked about her as if roused from a sleep; but later on, when I addressed her as Miss Gelden, she abused me horribly, and said it was an impertinence for me to call her Miss Gelden. 'Who are you, then?' I asked, just to humour her. 'I am Mrs. Theodore Lockstud, remember that!' Oh yes, she is out of her mind, sure enough! She'll be a case for

the Warrelda Asylum, poor thing!" Well, Master Rol, I turned quite sick and faint, and felt sure then it must be Mrs. Goldwin, though it would be hard to recognise her now, with her black hair and pinched, ghastly face without a bit of beauty. And to hear her talk about the fidelity of Indian widows, and scold everybody who comes near her for not letting her die on her dear Theo's grave! "I'll die there yet, in spite of you!" she keeps on saying. She quite forgets the name of Goldwin, it seems, and I—when I knew who she was—begged not to have to attend to her, saying I was frightened.'

Here Mrs. Dropper caught at her breath and wiped her eyes.

Roland sat still as death during the recital, but as soon as there came a pause he turned to his foster-mother a countenance softened and pitying.

'You were right to say I should feel no revenge with the knowledge of this. It is dreadful! Is there no hope?'

'I don't think so. The hospital doctor said not, and, just as the other nurse had said, he thought her a subject for the asylum, and took it upon himself to get her removed there, and I was told off with a wardsman besides to bring her on to Phillipia, and get her up the river to

the Warrelda Asylum. So I pinned this thick veil about my face for fear of accidents, and thought it better to come than make a fuss. But she never knew me. And we called her Mrs. Lockstud all the time—you know, they always give in to the whims of mad people—and she is there safe and sound. I asked the asylum doctor what he thought of the case, and if she would get her senses ever, and he said: "Yes, on her death-bed, perhaps, and that can't be very far off." That is all, Master Rol, and that is why I am here. I can't start for Debella until this evening, and then I shall set to work again, and pray for the poor creature to die. It makes one sorry she didn't take enough of the laudanum to kill her outright; better to be dead than alive as she is. She must have been attached to poor Mr. Lockstud, after all—more than attached, though she often railed against him to me. Perhaps that was a blind. And I am thankful to meet you. I could go down on my knees and say, "Thank God!" Now you know all I have to tell.'

'Good heaven!' ejaculated Roland again; 'what will Larry say to this?'

'That's the old man she used to call a gorilla?'

'I suppose so; she did not like him.'

‘Like him? She hated him, and I have hated her; but not now—not now. I’m getting on in years, and begin to sicken of all the misery and wickedness there is in the world. When once I feel fit for it, I’ll pray to die.’ She got up and held out her hand for the second time. ‘We may never meet again, Master Rol—who knows? I tell you, I am sincerely sorry—sincerely contrite—for my part in the sin. I trust to a merciful God for pardon. Won’t you give yours, full and free—you, the dear child I nursed and watched over for years?’

He rose now, and clasped her hand, and answered thickly :

‘As God is my witness, I forgive you with all my soul.’

‘Amen! amen!’ murmured the poor woman in a choked voice. ‘Oh,’ she added, ‘ask Miss Jessie to forgive me, too.’

‘Miss Jessie,’ replied Roland, ‘is too nigh to the angels this hour for me to question her wishes or her purity of thought. I am sure she forgives you, and all concerned.’

‘God bless you and her!’

And Mrs. Dripper wrung his hand, dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief, and hurried away.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE SEVERING OF THE GORDIAN KNOT.

SHORTLY after Roland's meeting with Mrs. Dripper, Washington Larry arrived early one morning in time to partake of the general breakfast at Unaville.

Eager to force an adopted fatherhood even on the son of his one-time enemy, he resolved to journey again to Phillipia, and follow Roland as soon as he could leave the station. The news of Lockstud's death accelerated his departure from Knutsford, and owing to this he was in Greycott to receive Roland's message in reference to Tackerline's advice about the reading of Jerry's packet, and hence his return message stating that he was coming down, and desiring delay in the opening of it. This determination to stand by the lad who had won his heart at the outset brought a healthy purpose into his narrow life. It was a new thing to

him to feel that somebody existed, depending on his help, who would be all the happier, perhaps, for his affection. It was as a draught of fresh, invigorating air—a flood of sunshine to penetrate his tough skin and warm his old bones—something to give him a new interest beyond the turning over of money on the station, and stroking a cat—a new Cicero—to remind him of the happy days of yore.

There was an odd rejuvenescence about him, a revived attempt at old jokes, and a decided effort to straighten his back. The knowledge of Jessie's illness and the doctor's fiat did not oppress him, excepting in his sympathy with Roland; for, of course, the girl was his sister, he reasoned, and it was natural for him to be troubled. He was not aware of that other tie which had once linked them, nor of Jessie's desperate love; the only explanation he had received relative to Mrs. Dripper's full confession had come from the Captain, who had been left quite as ignorant as Larry of the real circumstance leading to the disclosure, and had been led to believe that the foster-mother, overburdened with the weight of her own sin, had been compelled to make known everything to Roland, and so had flown from the shelter of Goolgun. But Larry had not forgotten that

Saturday night when Roland had indignantly refused his counsel against entering the Lockstud family, and had even gone so far as to hint at the probability of his marriage with the eldest daughter.

‘He flirted a lot with her, I dare say,’ he said to himself, ‘and was fond enough of her to say a thing like that. He don’t like to think of it, anyhow.’

To Roland he said soothingly :

‘Well, well, it is all a muddle to me a’ times to see how things get twisted the wrong way. Now, if that yaller-haired witch had gone long ago—when *she* was a girl—lots of trouble would ha’ been saved other people. D——n her! I say.’

And here he was to learn for the first time that she—the witch—was already anathematized, for Roland put out his hands to stop further invective, and said with much pathos :

‘Don’t—don’t say that! A curse has alighted without human invocation.’

‘Not strong enough,’ said Larry, thinking her poverty and expulsion from house and home were alone alluded to.

‘Not strong enough?’ repeated Roland in dismay. ‘Oh, you don’t know; she is in purgatory now on earth—a soulless, mindless woman—an inmate of a lunatic asylum.’

Roland, thinking the hopeless overthrow of intellect and darkness of soul the heaviest of human afflictions, expected Larry to be shocked, and thought he was, for the old man vented a convulsive 'Ah!' and no more for a few seconds. But Larry was not shocked, and that interjection was given as if he had inhaled a strong smelling-salt to take his breath away temporarily with its pungency, but yet to offer relief immediately after.

Understanding Roland's disposition in the matter not to be quite in harmony with his own, he did not wish to betray to him a sense of exultation, which was certainly uppermost with the powerful sniff drawn from this unexpected information.

'Mad, is she?' he mentally cried. 'Well, thunder! that's about squaring things, for she's drove plenty mad in her time.'

Roland, misconstruing his silence, spoke again.

'Yes, in a lunatic asylum. She tried to poison herself, and failed. The doctor brought her back to life and purgatory.'

'Ah!' said Larry for the second time. That she should rush desperately at Eternity's gate only to find it fast locked against her still was better, he thought, than an easy transit from



life to death as a probable settlement of her difficulties. So, at a loss for words of a neutral kind—safe not to expose his heart, yet not to express sorrow—he fell back on another ‘Ah!’ and abruptly turned the subject. ‘Come, what’s the good of talking about it?’ he said. ‘We’ll drop her. What about that packet?’

‘What packet?’ asked Roland in abstraction, his thoughts at Warrelda that moment.

‘What packet?’ echoed Larry brusquely. ‘Why, Jerry’s, to be sure. Have you forgotten?’

‘Oh, I must confess to having forgotten all about it within the last few days; there has been so much to think about of more consequence.’

‘You’re a fine feller! What has fetched me here but that packet?’ asked Larry, who had not come for the reading of Jerry’s packet alone, but wished it to appear so. ‘I want to be by, and protect him in case he’s too hard on himself, you see.’

‘Very good. When do you wish it opened? It is immaterial to me. Your time can be mine.’

‘Thunder! I’m more anxious for it than you.’

‘That is true. It is too much like digging

into the poor fellow's grave for my fancy, and stirring up decayed bones best left alone, perhaps ; but the sooner over the better, since it has to be done. Let us go this morning, if you like, and ask the Captain to join us ; he knows all about it.'

But to this Captain Pennacove objected. Unlike Larry, he could not find any pleasure in listening to what might be a private confession, although he knew quite as much of his old friend's past as Larry did. There might be more to know, possibly, of which he would rather remain in ignorance, and therefore he declined. About an hour later on, and the day of Larry's arrival, Roland, finding the lawyer could spare an hour or so, was seated with Larry and Tackerline in the private office of the latter. The three—the old squatter, the quondam ward, and the legal adviser—sat at the office-table. Roland in the centre, appointed reader, with his hands on the packet - a big blue oblong envelope, bulging with its contents. His fingers trifled nervously with it, and his voice had not its usual strength and clearness, as he said, turning first to Larry, and next to the lawyer :

'Now you, and you, are my witnesses this hour that I, on behalf of the dead son of a

dead father, at the instigation of you, my witnesses, do break open this envelope, deeming it incumbent upon me. Is that not so ?

‘That is so,’ responded the lawyer solemnly.

‘Go ahead !’ cried Larry, impatient.

‘And in this compact,’ continued Roland, ‘we, as three just men fearing God, ask His mercy and pardon if we should be misguided in our present action.’

‘Amen !’ said Tackerline.

‘Amen !’ repeated Larry ; ‘and now fire away ! Do as that Bible chap done—cut the Gordian knot, you know. Cut away, youngster !’

In spite of confused memory, his simile was not without its application, as shall be seen ; but the utterance of it for a few moments robbed the proceedings of their solemnity, and compelled a smile to broaden on the lawyer’s face ; while Roland’s upper lip took its wonted curve—a slight wave of amusement.

Roland slit the envelope with his penknife, and could no more liken himself to the Macedonian warrior than he could believe his knife to be that victorious sword said to have severed the famous knot ; and yet you will understand in due course that it would not be such an absurd or extravagant comparison, either.

A thick folding of letter-paper was withdrawn and spread open on the table before the three men ; and Roland, conscious of a strange palpitation at his breast, bent over the opened sheets and began to read aloud Jeremiah Goldwin's communication to his son.

It was written in a cramped, somewhat illegible hand, closely packed, and it occasionally lapsed into solecism and incoherence ; but these deficiencies did not detract anything of its interest for the one who read and the two who listened. Thus it opened :

‘ “DEAR BOY,

“ I am only a shaking old man, about to die, and to write the longest letter ever written in my life—but write I must ; for she's at my elbow—a ghost—the ghost of a woman ! Her eyes burn me like live coals, her fingers guide mine ; they are like steel—so hard, so cold, gripping mine ; and her voice is like a stormy wind, with a howl like a sick dog's, at my ear, and she whines, ‘ Write ! write ! write ! ’—and write I must ! Last night I saw your mother through that blood-red pane, saw her lips touch that fellow's—that traitor—that man I took a fancy to and gave a billet because his name was Lockstud, and because he

was an old friend of hers, she told me. Oh yes, he was an old friend—a great friend. I crouched at the window, and the ghost bent over me, and pointed a finger at her, and gave a croaking laugh. ‘See your fond wife, fool! her heart is that man’s—not yours. She avenges my brother’s death—your first wife’s death. See?’ Yes, your mother, my son, is my second wife, and my first was sweet and true. And I, in jealous rage, not knowing the truth, hurled Basil Sebaste to his death; for he had my sweet little Stella in his arms and his vile mouth on her cheek; and so I sprang on him, and he died. The fall on the fender did for him, but my arms threw him, and I sent him out the world—not at once; he lingered, but yet he died before the week was out—and I killed him. That woman, his sister, Helen Sebaste, bent over him, feeling his heart, his pulse, binding his temple with her handkerchief, getting redder and redder with his blood, and Stella swooned. But for that swoon I could have struck her too in my madness, only she looked like death, and that other woman rose to her feet and cursed me. ‘You shall suffer! you shall hang! The law shall show no mercy to such devils as you, Cecil Kovodel!’ she cried——”

Here Roland, drawing a sharp breath, was compelled to stop. He straightened himself, and rested well back against his chair. There was awe written on his countenance, his hands shook, his words at the last had become slightly indistinct, and he turned appealingly to the lawyer, requesting him to finish the reading.

‘Why, what’s up?’ asked Larry. ‘Has it scared you? You read on; you’ll understand it soon. Any man would ha’ done the same.’

‘It is marvellous,’ said Roland, not addressing anybody in particular, and making no attempt to continue.

‘It is not an uncommon occurrence,’ remarked Tackerline, wondering at Roland’s evident agitation. ‘But I will read it since you wish it.’

The lawyer took the sheets into his own hands, and, peering at them closely through his glasses, took up the thread where Roland had dropped it, while Roland, as grave as Hamlet before his father’s ghost, leaning forward with his hands supporting his head and his elbows on the table, remained thus till John Tackerline drew to the conclusion.

“‘And now,’” read the lawyer, “‘after all these years the curse has ripened—has found me out. I’ve been fooled—duped by a woman I must

love still, a snake fawning on me for my money—a beautiful snake, your mother—not wholly false, but false enough to prove how right poor old Wash was—false enough to drive me crazy and never to wish to see her again. Poor old Wash! he wouldn't stand by and see me wronged in any way.”

‘Ay,’ put in Larry with a groan.

“‘Oh,’” continued Tackerline, “‘I loved her, and I love you, my son—dote on you, have plotted and planned for you, have prayed to live to see you grow! There were years of life in me till last night, now the old craft is sinking, and I daren't look at her again; she'd bewitch me again, and I want to punish her like she has punished me, through the cursed money. I'll be even with her; but you, my boy, when you read this, may provide for her as it shall seem good or just, and may remove the yoke I shall fix about her neck. As a man you shall judge, as a son you shall do your duty, if she lives, and never visit her sin to me upon her head. That's all about her. Now for poor little Stella and that wretch, Basil Sebaste. With her white face, and him stiff in death, as I thought, I fled from the house where but a little time ago I had settled down happy with my young wife. I fled to a friend—Timothy

Pennacove—the best friend of my early days, second mate on board the *Gitano*, and my successor as first mate when I gave up the sea for Stella. He rose to Captain since, but I made it worth while for him to give up the sea, too. He brought me to my senses ; he told me I had been too rash—hinted at Stella not being in the wrong, and when thinking that I would have rushed back to her, he held me from going, saying I was going straight for a reef with my eyes wide open ; said if my girl was false I was better away, and if she was true she'd follow me, for he was off for Australia the very next day, and vowed he'd carry me off with him. So he did ; he smuggled me on board the old *Gitano*, and the hue and cry never reached me. Shaved and dyed and dressed as a Jack-tar, I sailed, as I thought, from the clutch and the curse of Helen Sebaste. The old Captain never smelt a rat at all, and thought me a sailor friend of the first mate, asking to work his passage to Australia. But one young sailor fellow, sharper than the master, found me out, and I told him everything, and he helped to keep the dodge afloat. That same is Jacob, now as old as me, and well provided for on the Washington run. I like to reward my friends as Monte Cristo did. Well,



my son, as soon as I arrived I dropped the sailor clothes, and I became Jeremiah Goldwin ; each name had its own meaning. I meant to win gold, and there was always a jeremiad at my heart. But when the *Gitano* sailed back I sent a letter by Tim to old Lockstud, Stella's guardian——”

‘Lockstud!’ interpolated Tackerline ; ‘that’s strange, to meet the name here, isn’t it?’

It was a mere comment urged by the question of coincidence to which the name pointed, and only met with a grunt from Larry.

Roland never spoke—never changed his position.

“Sent a letter by Tim to old Lockstud, Stella's guardian,” repeated Tackerline, “explaining everything, and asking for news of my wife. I didn't get an answer for months ; remember, it was all sailing then, and it was a long time before Tim touched England again ; and when it did come—from Tim, not Lockstud—it floored me, and I took to money-making like a man to dram-drinking to keep him from thinking. I had been all wrong, it said. Basil Sebaste had been an old flame of Stella's, but before she met me she had found him out for a villain, and what she had once thought love was only infatuation or fascination

with the cur's handsome face. Old Lockstud told Tim this, mind, and swore I should never see my wife again—that he wouldn't trust her to a mad-brained scamp, wouldn't disgrace her with my name! I was a murderer, and had better not show my face in London, or the law would have me. He was in a towering rage, and at the last blubbered like a girl, for he was so fond of my Stella. 'Why didn't she tell her husband of her old lover, then?' asked Tim; and to this Lockstud said she was frightened to tell, because I had once said I couldn't bear to think that she ever cared for any man but me. I did say it, for my love was strong and fierce. Well, this fellow had some letters of hers, said Lockstud, for which she had begged, but he wouldn't give them up till he saw there was something to be made by them, and then he and his sister came upon her one day when I was out, and he had her letters with a big price set on them. She offered to give it, too; and then the wretch, not satisfied, dared to embrace and kiss her. There it is in a nutshell. I cast him from her and threw him; she swooned, and died six months afterwards in child-birth. So I helped to kill her and the child—at least, I'm not so sure about the child. Whether girl or boy

Lockstud wouldn't tell, and neither would he say outright whether it was living or dead, and that's all old Tim could tell me. Now, my boy, understand there might be somebody living of the name of Kovodel. I could not make inquiries without betraying my true name, and, besides, Stella was rich, and I knew the child, if living, would have all hers, and that the Lockstud folks would see to it. I've always been on the alert to find a Kovodel, but have never met with one bearing the name. Old Lockstud had plenty relations, and I sometimes thought this Theodore Lockstud might be one of them, but daren't ask him any questions. It was for this I was so ready to befriend him, for I liked the old man, and wanted to make some sort of reparation. Again, remember Stella's maiden name was Maybell, and she may have taken *that* name; so be on the look-out for a Maybell if you can't find a Kovodel, and do something to help one or other on in the world, if it is needed. I almost forget that I am not Jeremiah Goldwin now; that is, I did till last night. I was very miserable over Tim's letter. I prayed hard in those days, but think I prayed more to Stella than God, knowing that she was innocent and good, and feeling I had wronged her so, and would

have liked to die, only I wasn't fit. I said I'd live and get rich and found charities, and do good with my riches, and bury the old name, and raise one that should be honoured. So I got rich, and the years rolled by, and I didn't pray so often I fear. A friend came to me in my loneliness : he loved me ; he saved my life, and for it I told him all my past ; but it made no difference, he stuck to me, he did, and thought me a good man in spite of all. He believed in me, and helped me to believe in myself, and we two rough chaps were close as a pair of lovers, dear old Wash and me." "

Here Larry displayed visible emotion. Roland never stirred, and Tackerline was the only one of the three calm, cool, and collected, as he read on :

" "About six or seven years after Stella's death an advertisement went the round of the newspapers. Somebody wanted news of one Cecil Kovodel, whether living or dead. Well, my boy, as Cecil Kovodel was buried as soon as his escape was good, I answered the advertisement, stating I knew him well, and that the man was dead and buried. Jeremiah Goldwin was too wide awake, too old a bird, to be caught in that way ; and now you know all. I shall lay that ghost—Basil's sister's ghost. She

goes as I write. Her grip loosens, the fire in her eyes is dying out, she can do me no more harm. She is going—going—she is gone! Go, tell Basil he is avenged. Lucky Jerry's day is done. Good-bye, son; good-bye to all I held dear—wife, wealth, and child; yes, and Wash and Tim. You own my surname in your second. I would have it so, that you might not have a wholly false name. Whatever it is, I pray you to keep it honoured. May God send a blessing on it for you—for your heirs! May He forgive me, and show you how to forgive. In this confession I hope I wash my hands of that man's blood! Amen.”

Thus the reading concluded. John Tackerline rustled the leaves in his hands in the act of refolding; his brow was more corrugated than ever; there was trouble written there. The history in itself did not affect him; he was not wholly inclined to blame; but he was not pleased to have the knowledge of a crime thrust upon him, or to think that he had been instrumental in the revelation of it. It presented, too, complications from a legal aspect. His search for next-of-kin to Goldwin, as it transpired now, was to grope for shadows, and was fully understood to be so by the two men

appointed heirs in the absence of next-of-kin. This, then, accounted for their confident assertion that none would be forthcoming. The packet threw another light upon the matter, and pointed to the possible existence of a relative of the name of Kovodel. In such a case it would be his painful duty to seek for a Kovodel instead of a Goldwin ; and, supposing one to be found, it would not only oust the young man at his side from any foothold on the estate that the heirs had contemplated making for him, but might lead to the exposure of the family disgrace, which otherwise could be hushed. But as yet he would not hint at these facts to Roland ; but, turning to him, said gently, noting what he thought to be an attitude of dejection, and not seeing his face, it being hidden now behind his hands :

‘ He only erred through jealous love ; his goodness since has surely purged that stain from his soul. Many a man, under the same provocation, has been maddened to violence. Being temporarily insane, he was scarcely responsible for his action.’

Larry, never waiting for Roland to reply, leaped from his chair, and, going over to the lawyer, brought a horny palm down on his shoulder with a familiar slap :

‘Thunder! you’re a brick! You never said a truer word.’

At last Roland lifted his head, and did not show the pained face that Tackerline had been expecting to see. Yet he was experiencing a sense of suffocation from over-wrought feeling, and his features twitched.

‘Cheer up, youngster!’ said Larry; ‘there’s no harm done.’

Then Roland, quivering from head to foot, rose from his chair, and began to pace the office as if to wake himself up or warm his blood, and went through a sort of pantomimic posture, with his head thrown back and eyes fixed in a strange ecstasy on the ceiling, with his hands locked in each other convulsively, and lips moving, but giving no sound; and the two men looking on believed him half demented, until with a rare effort his speech came back to him, and he, standing still, turned to them, and spoke:

‘I thank you, Mr. Tackerline, and you, Mr. Larry, for urging this duty on me. But for that, my key would have lain idle and useless. Bear with me. I have not lost my senses. I say I possess the key. Let me drive to Unaville and bring it to you. I implore you to give me another hour, and read it at once.

Don't delay. Don't deny me. I shall fall into a desperate state if I have to keep to myself what that key can tell.'

This ungovernable ebullition communicated itself in a certain portion to Tackerline and Larry.

The former breathed an exclamation of surprise, and rose in some excitement, wondering what was to come next.

The latter let fly a good round oath.

The one said :

'Go and bring it, then. I shall be ready.'

The other said :

'He shan't go alone ; he ain't fit to be trusted.'

So that when Roland caught up his hat and hastened from the office without another word, Larry did likewise, and followed him into the street and into a cab.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### A MILLIONAIRE AFTER ALL.

IN less than an hour Roland, with Larry, returned to the lawyer's office. He could not sit down, nor could he read that which he had described as the 'key.' Again Tackerline was requested to do the reading, and Roland, having set the little book on the table before him, stood behind the lawyer's chair, with his hands grasping the back of it. It was the little book that Aunt Jessie had given over to his keeping, and upon which so much depended for Roland himself, and which in its full and weighty significance he could not yet properly comprehend.

The only emotion working him now was of marvel and awe combined, in the recognition forced upon him of the strange dovetailing of two histories falling into his own hands, and having, as he once thought, no possible connection with each other. It was the diary of

Theodore Lockstud's mother, written in her girlhood, in angular characters, and in a jerky, irregular, disjointed fashion.

John Tackerline and Larry were alike infected now with Roland's impatience to read and find for themselves the 'key' that lay waiting somewhere in hiding amidst the leaves of the little book that the former held in his hand—the solution of some mystery—and close to his eyes after the manner of short-sighted people. And thus he read :

“ August 15, 184 -. — School-days over, and I'm engaged again. Only to think what a narrow escape I have had! If dear old Guardie had not been such a good, gentle Guardie, I might have been wicked enough to deceive him—might have been the wife of an adventurer. But I couldn't deceive him. Fortunately I told him everything, though Basil urged me to say nothing. What a trap he and his clever sister laid for me! An innocent, silly school-girl! How clever she was to get him into the school as music and singing master, because poor old Bandini went away! How she fooled me; how fond of her I was; and how I thought I loved him! But it wasn't love at all—how could it be? For don't I love Cecil now with all my heart? Their father

was Greek, but the mother an Englishwoman, they told me, and I dare say *that's* true; for Basil is like a Greek god for beauty. Pshaw! I hate handsome men! Cecil is worth fifty handsome men; and, oh, how he loves me! For me he left his ship, and will never leave me. He isn't rich, but what matter? I am. And, besides, he *is* rich in himself. Guardie says he is a rough diamond, and doesn't the diamond glitter for me—even without the dandy polish? It does. I wish I had the courage to tell him all about Basil, but I haven't yet. He is so *jealously* fond of me, stupid fellow! I will tell him some day, and I'll move heaven and earth to get those letters of mine from Basil. Oh, Stella Maybell, what a little idiot you have been! I'll have my little sister from school as soon as Cecil and I are married. She mustn't run the risk her sister has—nearly being married to a villain: a man—oh, it makes me shudder!—a man who embezzled once, and came over here under the name of Sebaste. Guardie found all that out. I ought to be thankful, and am; and in less than three months I shall sign myself Stella Kovodel——”

Tackerline paused here and drew a long breath. Roland still clutched at the chair-back,

and Larry was beginning to understand that the writer of the diary was no other than the first wife of his old friend. But neither he nor the lawyer held the key yet to which Roland had so wildly alluded.

‘It is strange,’ remarked Tackerline, ‘that this should fall into your hands, Goldwin.’

‘Thunder!’ cried Larry, ‘I am sorry for that little lady. If poor old Jerry could ha’ seen that, he’d never ha’ married that yaller-haired witch!’

‘Go on, go on,’ said Roland petulantly. ‘Read! read!’

And the lawyer, not interested, but eager to grasp the key, read obediently, patiently wading through the simple records of a girl’s days, and rhapsody over Cecil Kovodel, and comments on places visited with him, and the people they met. Then came a break and a leap over half a year.

“May 30, 184—.—Well, who can keep a diary with all the travelling and sight-seeing occupying one’s time, and a husband who will have every moment of the day with me? Dear little book, I fear you are doomed, and some day I shall burn you for rubbish. I have been married six months, and we have been travelling and had a nice time—no time for

diaries; and the three months before our wedding were just filled up with milliners and dressmakers, and embroidery and love-making; so I couldn't write as much as I wished. Now I'll just make one more note and drop you at the bottom of my box, till Cecil gets tired of me and gives me more time. But that won't be ever! I am wondrously happy! That is my note. Now rest, my diary."

It evidently did rest, for the next record was dated close on three months later, and rang out a dismal change:

"August 20, 184—.—I have you again in my hand for an entry which must be written. My last words set down stare me in the face—mock at me. 'I am wondrously happy!' Can I be the same girl who wrote them? For who so wretched as I? It is all over. Wedded bliss all gone, never, never to return! I have been so ill, they thought I would die; yet I live still to write this. They sent for Jessie—dear little thing!—to cheer me, and I did not know her. For her sake I try to keep up. Poor child! she clings to me so and frets over me, but does not understand all I suffer. She never saw Cecil, and now, perhaps, I shall never see him again—never see my baby! I shall droop and die in my misery! He has

gone ; he has left me ; and Basil is dead. Let me think how it happened. I want to write it all down for Jessie. She can't understand now, but she will when she is older ; and then Guardie will give her this little book, and she will know exactly how it all happened. Let me think. Oh, how my head swims, and the tears blind me ! I must think. How was it ? Cecil was out for a walk—unfortunately a walk without me. I did not accompany him, for I was not feeling strong. I begged him to leave me at home (afterwards that helped to make him suspicious, perhaps), and I stopped at home, lazily lounging and reading a novel. Presently I was told that a lady and gentleman were in the drawing-room wishing to see me—old friends, who had not thought it necessary to give their names. Visitors had been coming and going for some time to welcome us, so it was nothing new, and I rose from my lounging, set my dress in order, and hastened to meet them. I met Basil and his sister. My first impulse was to fly, my second to remain and receive them with calm dignity. Helen's eyes flashed and her lips smiled.

“ ‘ ‘ We have found you out, you see,’ she laughed. ‘ Old friends can't be so easily separated, can they ?’

‘‘ I tried to appear at ease, and said :

‘ ‘ ‘ Miss Sebaste, I am willing to let bygones be bygones.’

‘ ‘ Basil laughed now.

‘ ‘ ‘ So are we, little Stella. You are nice and snug here.’ He looked all round the room impertinently with the eyes I once thought beautiful. ‘ But we really think you ought to impart some of the cosiness to us.’

‘ ‘ ‘ I don’t understand you,’ I said.

‘ ‘ ‘ Don’t you?’ he said. ‘ Well, now, doesn’t it occur to you that we don’t intend letting a chit of a girl play fast and loose with us. We want money, and your guardian, having ousted me from my employment, we look for redress from you—in fact, not wishing to be mean, we offer you a *quid pro quo* for that redress. I bring you your letters.’

‘ ‘ ‘ Oh, give them to me—give them to me!’ I almost screamed. My face was on fire, and I held out my hands. ‘ Give them to me, and I shall think kindly of you.’

‘ ‘ They both laughed as if amused.

‘ ‘ ‘ Thinking kindly,’ said Helen, ‘ won’t give us bread-and-butter, or clothes or a roof. What is your price for the letters?’

‘ ‘ I eagerly offered £20. They shook their heads. I offered £50, and they smiled at me

contemptuously. Basil had them all tied neatly together, but he, putting them back in his pocket, said :

‘‘‘Your husband will perhaps be more liberal.’

‘‘‘You mustn’t show them to my husband!’ I cried in terror. ‘Give them to me ; what is it you want for them?’

‘‘‘Nothing short of £200, young lady,’ he said ; and with that—O God !—he caught me in his arms, and said I owed him more than that. I was his promised wife. Cecil Kovodel had robbed him. I was more beautiful than ever—his sweet little Stella. He kissed me wildly, madly ; and Helen’s laugh, so spiteful, rang in my ears ; while I writhed, twisted, and fought with him, and felt my senses reeling. Suddenly he let me go. Was I dreaming, or silly ? Half fainting, I fell into a chair, and he was still struggling, but now with Cecil. They were wrestling, panting, fighting like dogs, and then it came to me. Cecil, entering, must have seen and heard. I remember Helen trying to separate them ; then Basil falling—seeing blood flow from his temple—his face marble-white, his eyes closed. Oh, I remember Cecil’s hand at my wrist, and his question, ‘Who is this fellow?’ and then Helen’s answer like a hiss :



‘The affianced husband of that false jade ; the man she has duped, wronged ; the man whose death shall lie at your door.’ With that I knew no more, for I swooned, and I don’t know how long I lay unconscious. I only know, when my senses returned, that I saw Guardie and his wife at my bedside, and no Cecil. They told me little by little all there was to tell. Yes, my husband had seen and heard everything, and he had thrown Basil, but he fell on the jutting point of the steel fender ; there was a gaping wound at his temple, and that led to his death. It was all in the papers, and Cecil—my Cecil—was being hunted for, and if found might be hanged, they said ; but they never found him. I prayed for his escape. They surely won’t have him now, for he is gone, and I shall never see him again ; and he is thinking me flighty, heartless, or false—anything but what I am : his devoted heart-broken wife. Oh, why was I such a coward not to tell him of Basil ? I have helped to his destruction ; I have made him an outcast, and I am compelled even to resign his name, and now live in an isolated corner of London, hiding my head, and shut out of the world, which to me was so bright but a short time ago. I am known as Mrs. Lockstud, a widow. Guardie bade me

take his own name, because of Kovodel glaring before the public. Jessie, too, thinks I am a widow, poor child! and am I not? Shall I live through it all, shall I? Shall I ever see my little one? Shall it and I meet ever the poor unhappy father? I fear not—I fear not. Yes, I am widowed indeed, for my darling is dead to me. God help him and me, and if I die, may he know the truth some day—know I am true. And if I die and my baby lives, in this my little book I set down my wish that my sister will be a mother to it. It eases my mind to write so, and a few years hence she will read what I have written, and I trust to her love for me to let the *child* know nothing of the disgrace that must stain our name. The *man* or *woman* may, if endowed with that sweet pity which shall show charity to the one great error of the father's life. I can write no more.”

Tackerline paused, drew out his handkerchief to flourish about his face, and would have spoken but for an impetuous ‘Go on, do go on!’ from Roland, who still grasped the chair-back. So he proceeded; but there was little more to be read, and the head of the key, peeping, shot forth a ray of light, and was soon fully exposed, stripped of its wrapping.

The next entry was in another hand-writing, dated six years later, and began with an abrupt announcement :

“ My beloved sister, Stella Kovodel, departed this life February 10, 184—, having given birth to a son, I being thirteen years old at the time.

“ I have not long been put in possession of this little book, which I hold as a sacred treasure—a sweet relic. Her dear boy, now close on six years old, I take to myself as my own. She consigned him to me, and to him will I endeavour to do a mother's duty. I don't know what has become of his father, and should not know him if he stood before me this minute. Mr. Lockstud, her guardian and mine, might have learned a great deal of him through a friend of his—the first mate of the *Gitano*, I believe—who brought a letter from Cecil from Australia, asking for news of his wife, and defending himself. But poor Stella was not long dead then, and Guardie's soft heart was heavy with grief and unforgiveness against the man who drove her to an untimely grave. He vowed that he would have nothing more to do with him, and he never answered his letter. But now he regrets the step, the stand he took, and is eager to discover the

whereabouts of the boy's father, to get some news of him for the boy's sake. For who knows but what the separation may deprive him of a possible inheritance? he says. He is in Australia somewhere, where they say gold is picked up in the streets, and where Cecil Kovodel may get riches. He is advertising for him throughout Australia, and I hope he will never be found. Theo will have his mother's legacy, and will be well-to-do without aid from his father. All my soul revolts against him, and the hot jealous blood that so surely killed my Stella. But for his son I hold myself responsible as regards his moral and intellectual training. He shall be as a son to me in all things, though I am married now, and have a little son of my own. So help me heaven!

“JESSIE CALLIPORT.”

There followed one more entry in the same writing, and dated quite three years later :

“Mr. Lockstud has received news of Cecil Kovodel's death, and Theo is all mine; not one can claim him now. He shall know of his father when I think the right time comes. He shall remain Theodore Lockstud to the end of his days.”

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It is useless to describe the fervour of the moment, the animation of Roland's face, the facial contortion of Larry, who, seemingly doubtful as to whether he was standing on his head or his heels, scratched perseveringly with a forefinger behind his ear, as if for further information, or John Tackerline's spasmodic accents and bodily jerks as he rushed almost breathlessly through this last memo—this indisputable testimony of Mrs. Calliport.

Larry remained for a time dumb, dazed, as though an invisible brick had been thrown at his head; while he looked stupidly around the office, wondering what had struck him, and produced a strange pain.

Not so the lawyer; he was in a state of effervescence. He shut to the book, dropped it on the table, leaped from his chair, made a rush at Roland, and, catching at his hand, shook it, as if the owner had just been rescued from a dangerous stream or a violent death, and lastly caught him by the shoulders to shake his whole body as he said:

‘You are a lucky dog, after all!’

‘You admit,’ said Roland, getting calmer as the lawyer waxed jubilant—‘you admit cause for my agitation now; you can understand me now. After all, I was no stranger in Jerry

Goldwin's house. It was not so unnatural a thing to be reared on his money. The debt is relieved of half its weight.'

'The debt!' gasped Tackerline. 'What debt? There is no debt in the case. Is it—can it be possible you have not conceived the weight of this revelation—that you have overlooked the fact of this key being more than a solution, but one to open the door lately closed to you by your own hand? Why, you are Goldwin's own grandson!'

'Exactly,' said Roland. 'That is the marvel and the relief.'

'Oh!' groaned Larry to himself, aware at last of the cause of the dull pain at his brain and breast. 'To think that wretch was my Jerry's own flesh and blood—his own son!'

'I really think, my lad,' went on Tackerline excitedly, 'your mind must be somewhat unhinged with the discovery of the relation of this little book to Goldwin's packet, else you could see for yourself. Why, boy, it lifts you out of the Slough of Despond indeed. If Lockstud were living he would surely be Jeremiah Goldwin's heir. Well, can you see it now? Lockstud is dead, and his eldest son comes next. *You* are next-of-kin, *you* are the man we want, *you* are the legal heir of Jeremiah

Goldwin. Before God and man you have in truth now the right to step at once with a firm footing into the inheritance you not so long ago resigned.'

At this Roland felt the room wave with him, and, overwhelmed, he sank into a chair as giddy as if he had been suddenly hoisted to a mountain-peak, or borne aloft on the wings of an eagle, nearer to the sun, nearer to heaven, with the blinding blaze affecting sight, and the glory of it evoking mute worship.

As in a trance he heard Tackerline still explaining, heard Larry exclaim: 'Thunder! my head is getting light. It's my dream my dream! There's Jerry I see him, I hear him! "Wash, this boy is my heir and no other!"'

That boy was Jerry's heir, and no other.

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Roland did not wait to be summoned to take a last farewell of Jessie, for but twenty-four hours after the revelation unfolding to him such an unexpected and dazzling vista of happiness he was lying to Wondoo, having previously apprised Mrs. Lockstud of his coming in a mysterious 'wire,' worded:

'Shall see you soon. Wonderful and good news. Tell Mid she must get well now.'

Jessie, with the knowledge that something had happened to Roland of a happy nature, certainly did revive in a temporary way—so far revived that she declared she felt able to rise from her bed, where she had been confined some days, and could dress and look her best to meet Roland once again when he should arrive. Una, outwardly calm, awaited him in feverish expectation of she knew not what; while Mrs. Calliport and Mrs. Lockstud made no secret of their perturbation excited by the telegram, but exchanged surmise constantly, and not one of the four anxious women, alike devoted to Roland, could possibly possess even an inkling of the tidings he had indicated as ‘wonderful and good.’ He came at last; but it was quite an hour after his entrance to the sanatorium that Una and Jessie were gladdened with his presence. Mrs. Lockstud and Aunt Jessie were the first to greet him, and they drew him into that little parlour before mentioned, the first to be served with that highly-seasoned dish he had in store for them.

He, as anxious to relate as they to hear, poured forth in detail all that he had come to tell.

The girls, in the meanwhile, waited as patiently as they could, and when Una recog-



nised his footsteps drawing near to the bedroom, where Jessie sat up in an easy-chair in readiness for his reception, she, only waiting for a glance at his face, slipped quickly and unperceived by him through a door that led to Mrs. Calliport's bedroom, in her desire to leave the brother and sister alone.

Mrs. Calliport had just returned from the parlour, but Mrs. Lockstud had followed Roland, thinking her daughter might need her through the ordeal of meeting him thus; for they had never looked upon each other since the cognition of their actual relationship.

So Una found Mrs. Calliport alone and on her knees, with a face uplifted, hands clasped, and lips moving as if in prayer. She would have retreated, but the old lady, hearing and seeing her enter, requested her to remain, and rising with alacrity most unusual, caught her in a warm and close embrace.

'Don't run away—don't run away, dear!' she cried, disposed to be demonstrative, and so beside herself that she was ready to do the most unheard-of things.

As if inoculated with that spirit of awe and marvel and gratitude and ecstasy which had animated Roland, her countenance, though tracked with tears, was radiant. Una, taking

her trembling hands, led her to a chair, into which she sank somewhat exhausted, while her breath was laboured as she managed to articulate :

‘Wonderful news, my dear!—oh, wonderful! Stella, Stella, if I had only known! If Theo had but known! And to think I never knew his father! Oh, what trouble might have been saved!—what disgrace!—what——’ And then followed a paroxysm of coughing, the sound of which, reaching Priscilla Lockstud’s ears, had the effect of bringing her hurriedly from Jessie’s to Aunt Jessie’s side.

She and Una gave the necessary assistance, and, the cough ceasing, Una turned to Mrs. Lockstud for a clue to the news just communicated.

‘Oh, what is it? What has happened?’ she cried. ‘It must indeed be something unexpected!’

Mrs. Lockstud was as incoherent, however, as Mrs. Calliport, and as full of ejaculation, and Una, desperately longing to know everything, determined to return to the room just quitted to learn all from Roland himself.

With anticipation and interrogation written on her face, blanched with emotion, she went to the door, and softly opened it.

Roland was sitting by Jessie's easy-chair, holding her little hand in his, and stroking it. Evidently he had not begun his wonderful story yet, for the elation and hope Una had noted in his step, and his cheery smile as he entered, were gone, and she heard him say :

‘No, Mid ; you will get strong -get well. There is happiness in store for us yet, for I am a rich man now.’

And then the rustle of her dress made him turn quickly. He rose at once and met her, but his hand shook as it pressed hers, and neither seemed able to find words.

It was Jessie who spoke first. There was a brightness about her that, like a shining veil of finest, softest texture, yet could not hide the sombre lining beneath—the lines of suffering—the shadow of what was to come. She looked from one to the other, and said :

‘Oh, this is like old times ! Come, Una, sit down, and let us talk, we three together.’

Roland and Una could not liken it to ‘old times,’ but they tried to smile as they sat down, one on each side of her—tried not to see the shadow beneath the shining veil.

‘It is a new time—a marvellous time !’ corrected Roland. ‘So much has happened, Una.’ He turned to her, trying to speak with the

heartiness of old, but failing, for his voice trembled and his features twitched. 'Jessie knew I had something good to tell, but she has not heard all yet. She says she is content to know it is good, and must have her say first. Like all women, she will have, I suppose, the first and last word. She has told me another story in a few words.'

With this he looked earnestly at Una—looked straight into her clear eyes, which suddenly lowered their curtains, as she found her heart beating wildly with the quick intuition of the gist of Jessie's story.

In this signal of confusion he read its sequel.

Here Jessie put out her two hands, one on each side, to grasp one of Roland's, one of Una's; holding them thus, she drew them towards each other, mustering all her strength in the effort, and placed Una's in Roland's, setting her own on both as a crown, the whole a living, throbbing love-knot.

'Una,' she began, 'Roland says he is rich again. And I am so grateful, though I don't know yet how it has all come about. He says I am to get strong and be happy. And I am happy already, now that you two understand each other at last. Hide nothing from him now, Una. He knows, and you know, God

meant you for each other, and me to be just what I am—a loving sister to both.'

Then one impulse moved Roland and Una alike, for, so linked, they rose together to stand, as if the spot whereon they stood had become consecrated ground, and Jessie no high-priest, but a God-sent angel uniting them.

They stood in silence, and as the feeble, plaintive voice of the dying girl fell sweet and low, Roland drew Una to his heart, and for the first time covered her lips with his own.

## EPILOGUE.

### IN SMOOTH WATERS.

UNAVILLE wears once again the aspect of the one-time Bachelor's Nest, for Una lives there no more, but only two quaint, stooping, white-haired old men, who smoke their pipes and drink their whisky toddy and take their strolls together ; for Washington Larry has resigned station life, has his Knutsford cat, and has cast his lines in with the Captain. Since Roland's claim had been legally established by John Tackerline, and the whole matter comfortably settled within the private circle to which alone Roland's history was known, and they had more than enough to supply their own wants, they were content.

The estate was wound up, and the disposition of the portion willed by Jeremiah Goldwin to certain charitable institutions had been attended to ; for two years have flown since

Roland learned that he was Jerry's heir ; since the wrong was righted, the crooked made straight ; since, to use Larry's own word, ' Things were squared up fine.' The Goolgun doors are thrown open to strangers, for Roland has elected to live elsewhere, being averse to the old associations : he and his wife reside in quite another locality, some distance from Virginia Bay, and intend shortly to visit Knutsford together.

There exists a baby Goldwin, too, to rule the house : a sweet, dimpled, starry-eyed autocrat of two months, christened Jessie, but better known as ' Mid,' and more often than not called ' Princess,' ' Queenie,' or ' Sweetest,' by her faithful nurse, Mrs. Dripper, who is far happier than she thinks she deserves to be, and who does not cease to shed a penitent tear and offer praise over the cradle where nestles ' the sweetest babe that ever crowed for kisses.' She prays alike at the cradle and the grave, a grave not more than half a year old, where a marble monument stands, on which is inscribed,

' SACRED TO THE MEMORY

OF

ISABELLA GELDEN,'

over date and place of death. Only a few know outside the private circle above alluded

to that the occupant of the grave was buried at Roland Goldwin's expense, that her tombstone was erected at his order. But those quixotic benevolent tendencies of his, to which Mrs. Goldwin had so frequently referred with scoffing, now protected him from too much comment. 'He is a millionaire,' said the few, 'and always did do odd things, you know, things that never harmed anybody, but often did much good.'

Charlie Mountfu had yet to learn much of the movements of his Phillipia friends. After coming to an understanding with Una Pennacove, he gave up his vocation at the shipping firm, and, for diversion, took to commercial travelling; and during his travels within the two years, owing to his will-o'-the-wisp life and flight into the far interior of other colonies, where few papers found their way, he failed to gather a sequence of those events touching old friends. But he knew of Una's marriage, and having recovered from his disappointment, he determined to call and see her, to renew the past friendship, as soon as chance offered.

Returning to Phillipia, he, to prepare himself for this visit, first sought out her old home to chat with her uncle, and glean all information of her surroundings. So he presented himself



one evening at Unaville, and was received with genuine warmth by the Captain and his mate, Washington Larry.

Seated at the table, just as Larry and Jerry had smoked and talked and sipped so long ago, he found the two, and sat down to make a third, while decanters, tumblers, spoons and sugar-bowl, side by side with a hot-water jug full to the brim, its boiling hot contents bedewing the metal cover, were arrayed before them.

Over their pipes, and with a glass of excellent sherry at his elbow, Mountfu plied his convivial hosts with questions, Larry only putting in a word here and there.

‘So your niece is Mrs. Goldwin?’

‘Yes,’ from the Captain.

‘She forsook her old love, then—the University? And yet she was as anxious one time for a degree as any politician for a portfolio.’

‘That she was,’ responded the Captain again. ‘But she is not the girl to give up anything she sets her heart on, let me tell you. She worked for her degree, and she got it, too.’

‘By Jove! she got it after all, eh? Well done!’

‘She did so,’ mumbled Larry, as proud of

her achievement as the Captain was, and pleased with Mountfu's 'Well done!'

He then relapsed into silence, sucking his pipe, and stroking Cicero, curled and purring across his knees.

'And she set her heart on the millionaire, and got him, too,' said Mountfu, taking a mouthful of his wine, and looking into the wineglass. 'What became of the other girl they said Goldwin was after — Miss Lockstud?'

At this question the Captain, feeling as if ice were trickling down his spine, was disconcerted.

'Don't you know? She's dead—died two years ago, about.'

'Dead! Good heaven! I never heard of it. I met her often here, and thought her a bonny girl. What happened to her?'

'Just family trouble, poor creature!' answered the Captain.

'Ah, yes; I remember her father's end. I heard it from you first. Terrible, wasn't it? And, then, he left his affairs in such a hopeless muddle.'

'Yes; it took the life out of her, sure enough,' asserted the Captain, puffing a cloud of smoke up to the ceiling. 'It nearly upset

Una—they were like sisters, you see—and she tended her to the last. She sent for the tribe of sisters and brothers to come to Wondoo and see the last of their eldest sister, and I liked the girl, and was anxious about my Una, too, so I went up to Wondoo myself. I won't forget it in a hurry. The poor thing was so changed. She flickered for a day or so, and they all thought she might come round; but she didn't, but just went off when they least expected it, quiet and happy like. Lord bless my girl, how Una felt it, to be sure! She couldn't settle to her books for a long time, and if it hadn't been for Rol she would never have been herself again, I'm sure.'

'It must have been harder on poor Mrs. Lockstud, though, don't you think?' said Mountfu.

'Well, of course it was—her troubles came so thick and fast; but it's a long lane that has no turning. The whole family is set up on its feet again, and back at Cecillambda.'

'What, is the rich old aunt gone too?'

'No; but she will go soon, I'm thinking. They hadn't to wait for her death to get hold of her money, because she took them off the raft and set them on a weather-tight boat. She's a rare old lady, is Mrs. Calliport.'

The Captain longed to be able to tell his inquiring young friend that Roland had put it into the widow's power to pay off every farthing owing to Theodore Lockstud's creditors—so agreeably astounded—that he had bought Cecil-lambda, and made it a deed of gift to Mrs. Lockstud, but dared not.

‘Well,’ remarked Mountfu, ‘that’s a salve for past afflictions. And what’s become of the handsome dowager, Mrs. Goldwin? Still in England?’

Here Larry took the pipe from his mouth, and was moved to speak, with an irony undetected by the young man :

‘Oh, the change done for her ; it upset her fine nerves.’

‘And is she dead, too? Do you mean she is dead?’

Larry closed his mouth on his pipe-stem and never replied. So Captain Pennacove answered, with a little shifting of his eyes :

‘We got news of her death about six months ago.’

‘Died abroad?’

‘I don’t exactly remember where,’ equivocated the Captain.

‘So that is the news, eh? She was a grand woman in her time.’ Larry writhed in his

chair. 'And the Lockstuds are back again in their old quarters? Well, life is a chequered work, isn't it? There was another daughter growing up—rather a fine girl, too—called Louisa, I think.'

'Yes,' said the Captain; 'she is a fine girl, and young Lannager thinks she is awfully like poor Jessie. I'm not sure but what she will be Mrs. Frank Lannager some day.'

'Well, Lannager isn't a bad sort,' said Mountfu, after draining his glass. 'But for luck Roland Goldwin is really his father's own son. It just seems to drop into his hands for the mere holding of them out.' Mountfu was thinking of his success in winning Una. 'He doesn't know what disappointment is—he doesn't know much of the hardships of life.'

The two old men exchanged meaning glances, and neither made any remark for a few seconds. It was Larry who broke the pause at length.

'Rol Goldwin,' he said, 'has Jerry's honest blood in his veins, and if he's got his luck too, he's only got what he deserves; and that's more than many a man can say.'

His tone was aggressive enough to assure Mountfu that he had unwittingly touched on a sore place, so he immediately prepared a plaster.

‘You’re about right there, Mr. Larry ; let’s drink his health.’ He helped himself to another glass of sherry. ‘Here’s to Roland Goldwin, the lucky and the deserving !’

He raised his glass, and the Captain followed suit ; Larry, appeased, did likewise, lifting his hand from Cicero’s back.

The three glasses clinked, and Mountfu added in all sincerity :

‘May the sun of his prosperity never go down ! May he share it all his days with her whose price is far above rubies ! May they be rich in sons and daughters !’

‘God bless them !’ responded the Captain.

Then quoth Larry with a wave of his pipe :

‘“All’s well that ends well,” says the prophet.’

THE END.









